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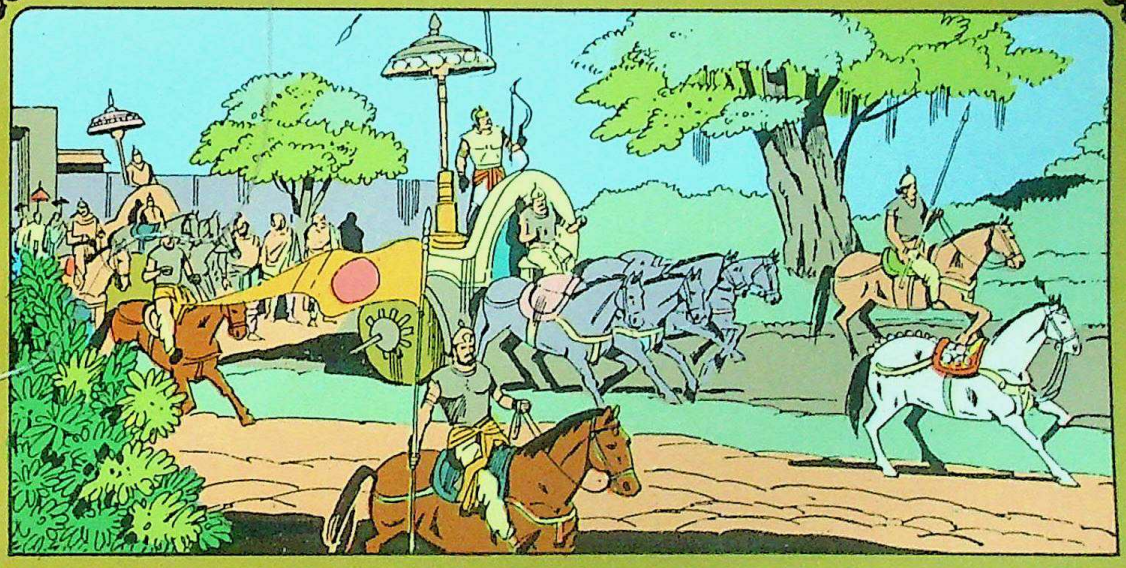
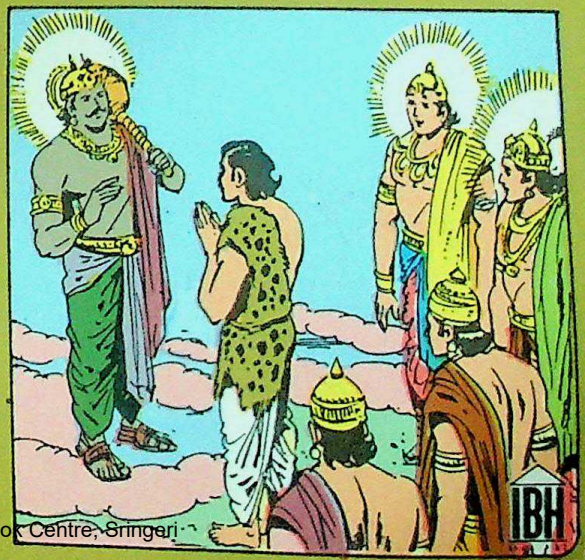
AMAR CHITRA KATHA

MAHABHARATA

PEACE AT LAST

• YUDHISHTHIRA'S CORONATION • ASHWAMEDHA YAJNA • THE CELESTIAL REUNION.





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PEACE AT LAST

Veda Vyasa's epic on the Bharata race was first recited in public by his disciple Vaishampayana at the Sarpa Satra (a 12-year-long snake sacrifice) conducted by King Janamejaya, the great grandson of Vyasa.

In our previous volumes of the Mahabharata we had described the earlier years of the growing animosity between the Kauravas and the Pandavas, the banishment of the Pandavas to the forest, the years spent by them in exile and the events leading to the inevitable war at Kurukshetra. Also narrated were the details of the fury of the eighteen days of battle from which the Pandavas emerged victorious.

The following three volumes of the Mahabharata narrate the coronation of Yudhishthira, Bheeshma's instructions to Yudhishthira as well as the Ashwamedha Yajna conducted by King Yudhishthira. The last volume describes the reunion of the heroes of the Mahabharata in heaven.

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Editor :
ANANT PAI

Script: Margie Sastry *Artworks:* Dilip Kadam

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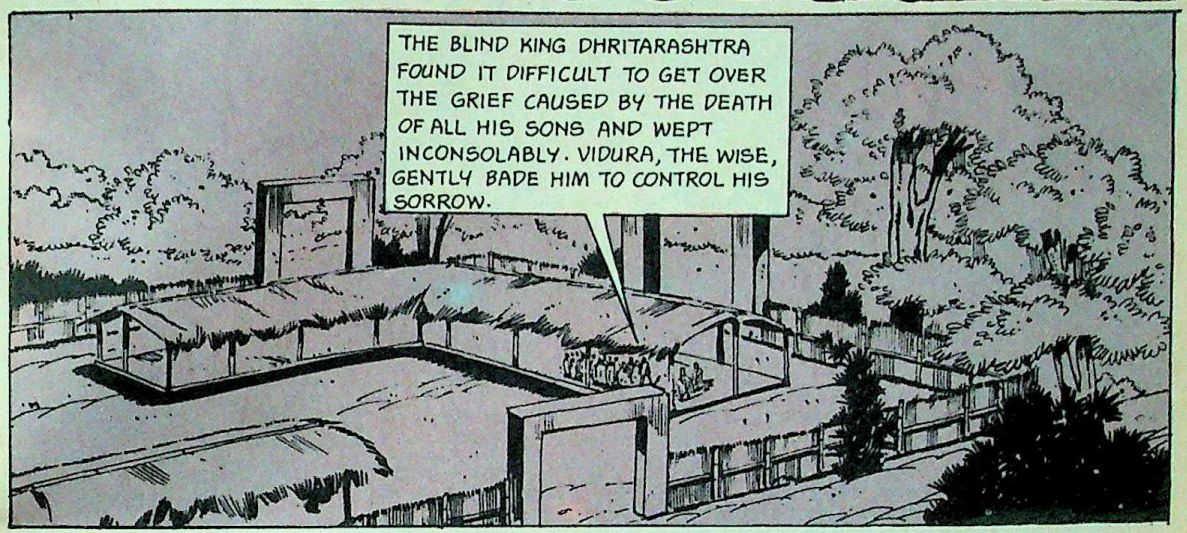
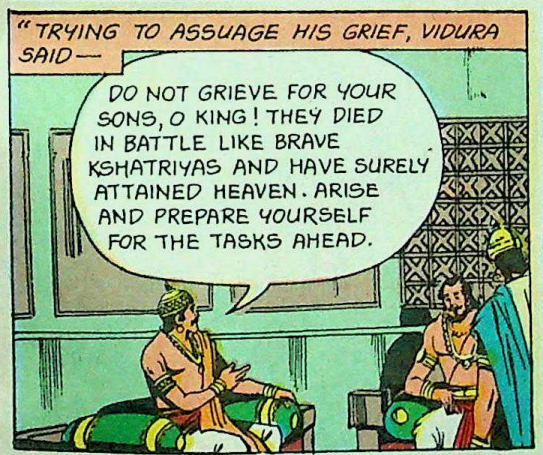
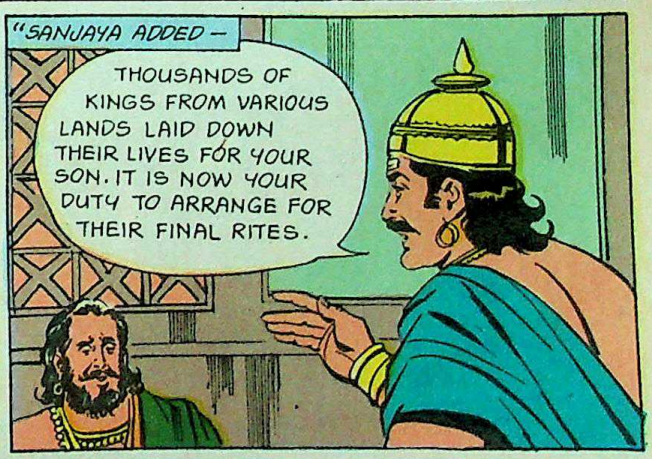
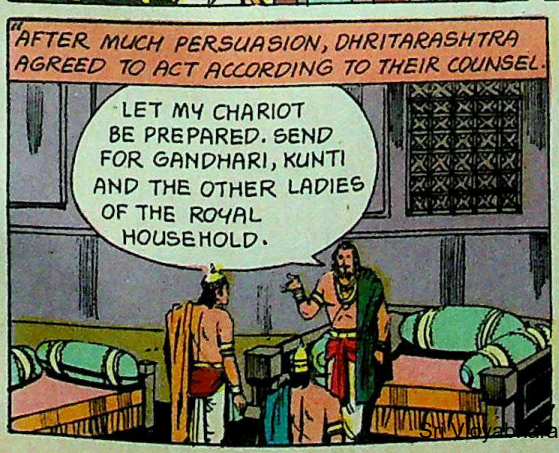
Mahabharata – 40

YUDHISHTHIRA'S CORONATION









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"WITH TEARS STREAMING DOWN THEIR FACES, THE WOMEN ASCENDED THE CHARIOTS. THESE LADIES OF THE ROYAL HOUSEHOLD WHO HAD NEVER BEFORE APPEARED IN PUBLIC NOW PASSED THROUGH THE MAIN STREET TO THE BATTLEFIELD, DRESSED IN MOURNING, UNADORNED BY JEWELS AND FINERY.

"ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF HASTINAPURA THEY MET KRIPACHARYA, KRITAVARMA AND ASHWATTHAMA.

"KRIPACHARYA SAID TO DHRITARASHTRA —

O KING, YOUR ENTIRE ARMY HAS BEEN DESTROYED. WE THREE ARE THE ONLY SURVIVORS.

"ADDRESSING GANDHARI, HE SAID —

YOUR SONS FOUGHT BRAVELY AND LAID DOWN THEIR LIVES LIKE TRUE WARRIORS. THEY MUST HAVE SURELY ATTAINED HEAVEN.

TO AVENGE DURYODHANA'S DEATH, WE ATTACKED THE ENEMY CAMP AT NIGHT. ALL THE PANCHALAS AS WELL AS DRAUPADI'S FIVE SONS HAVE BEEN KILLED.

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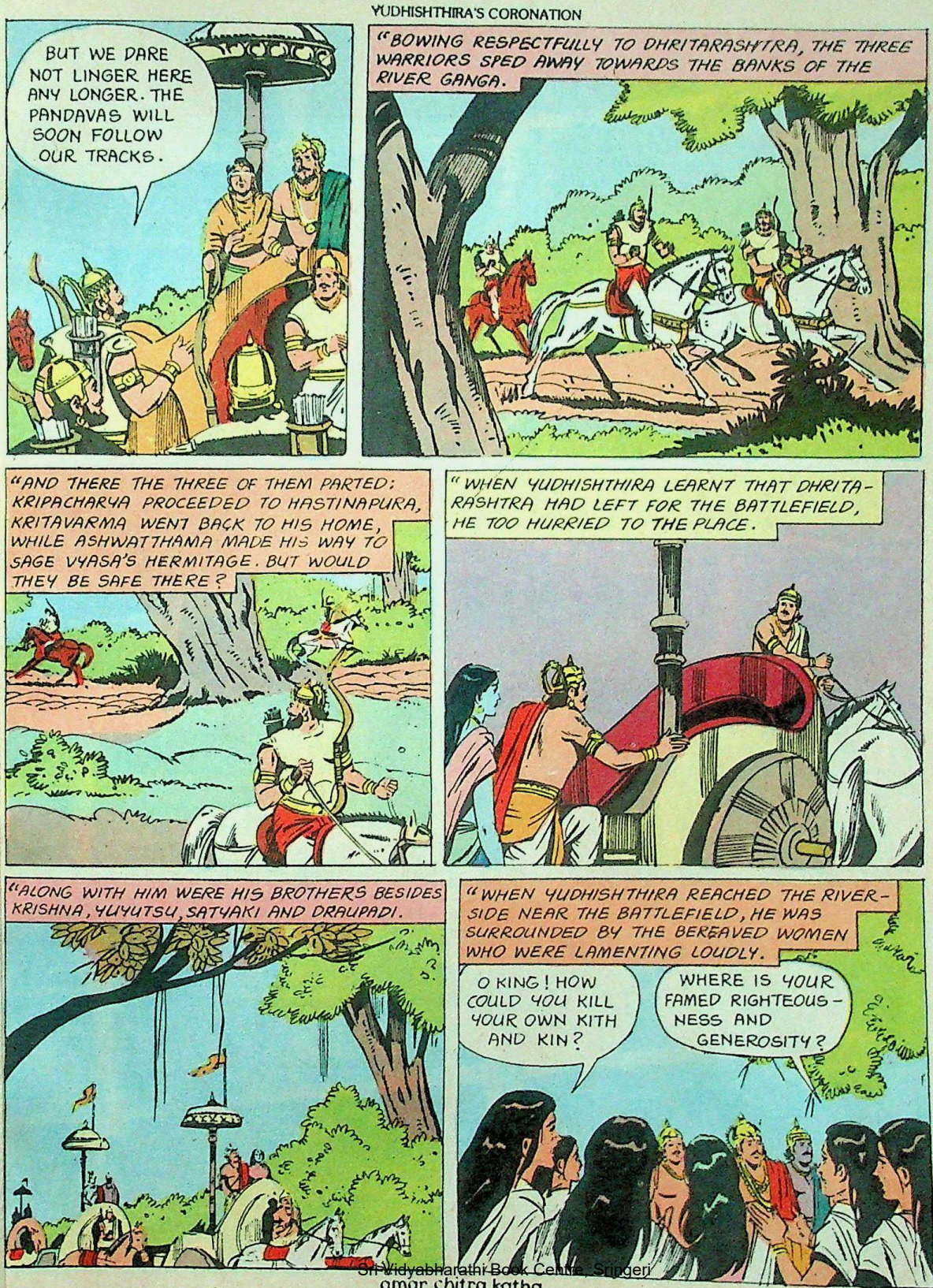

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"KEEN TO SPEAK TO HIS UNCLE DHRITARASHTRA, YUDHISHTHIRA WALKED PAST THEM...

"...AND WENT STRAIGHT TO DHRITARASHTRA. HE AND HIS BROTHERS PAID THEIR RESPECTS TO THE OLD KING. DHRITARASHTRA EMBRACED YUDHISHTHIRA. BUT THERE WAS NO AFFECTION IN THE GESTURE.

"THE BLIND KING APPEARED TO BE SEEKING SOMEONE. GUESSING HIS INTENTION KRISHNA QUICKLY PUSHED BHEEMA ASIDE.

"WITH A NIMBLE GESTURE, HE PLACED BEFORE DHRITARASHTRA AN IRON IMAGE OF BHEEMA.

"WITH SUCH FORCE DID DHRITARASHTRA CLASP THE IMAGE TO HIS BOSOM, THAT IT BROKE INTO PIECES.

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GASPING FOR BREATH AND WITH BLOOD STREAMING OUT OF HIS MOUTH, DHRITARASHTRA COLLAPSED.

"THE FAITHFUL SANJAYA HELPED HIM TO GET UP AND SAID —

YOU SHOULD NOT HAVE DONE THIS, O KING!

"HIS ANGER ABATED, DHRITARASHTRA WAS NOW FILLED WITH REMORSE.

OH BHEEMA! OH BHEEMA!

"LORD KRISHNA CONSOLED HIM.

GRIEVE NOT, O KING. IT WAS NOT THE REAL BHEEMA YOU CRUSHED WITH YOUR MIGHTY ARMS BUT MERELY AN IRON IMAGE.

I HAD ANTICIPATED YOUR ANGER AND ARRANGED FOR THE IRON IMAGE OF BHEEMA TO BE BROUGHT HERE. IT WAS THE ONE THAT DURYODHANA HAD USED TO PRACTISE WITH THE MACE.

"AFTER DHRITARASHTRA HAD RESTED AWHILE AND REFRESHED HIMSELF, KRISHNA SPOKE TO HIM AT LENGTH.

HOW CAN A WISE AND INTELLIGENT PERSON LIKE YOU REACT THUS? HAD WE ALL NOT WARNED YOU EARLIER? WAS YOUR CONDUCT NOT UNJUST ALL THIS WHILE?

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"DHRITARASHTRA ADMITTED —

YOU ARE RIGHT. I WAS UNDER DURYODHANA'S INFLUENCE. IT IS INDEED FORTUNATE THAT BHEEMA WAS SPARED. NOW I AM AT PEACE AND WOULD LIKE TO MEET ARJUNA.

"THE OLD KING THEN EMBRACED ARJUNA, BHEEMA, NAKULA AND SAHADEVA.

BLESS YOU! WITH MY SONS ALL DEAD, MY AFFECTION AND CONCERN WILL BE DIRECTED TO YOU, O SONS OF PANDU.

"RESPECTFULLY TAKING LEAVE OF DHRITARASHTRA, THE PANDAVAS AND KRISHNA WENT UP TO GANDHARI.

"BURNING WITH SORROW OVER THE LOSS OF ALL HER SONS, GANDHARI WAS ABOUT TO UTTER A CURSE ON THE PANDAVAS.

"READING HER MIND, SAGE VYASA INTERVENED IN TIME.

CALM YOURSELF. BEFORE YOU UTTER THE WORDS OF ANGER, HEAR WHAT I HAVE TO SAY TO YOU.

FOR THE LAST EIGHTEEN DAYS, YOUR SON DURYODHANA USED TO SEEK YOUR BLESSING BEFORE FACING THE ENEMY.

EACH DAY, YOU RIGHTLY TOLD HIM — WHERE THERE IS DHARMA*, THERE WILL BE VICTORY.

* RIGHTEOUSNESS.

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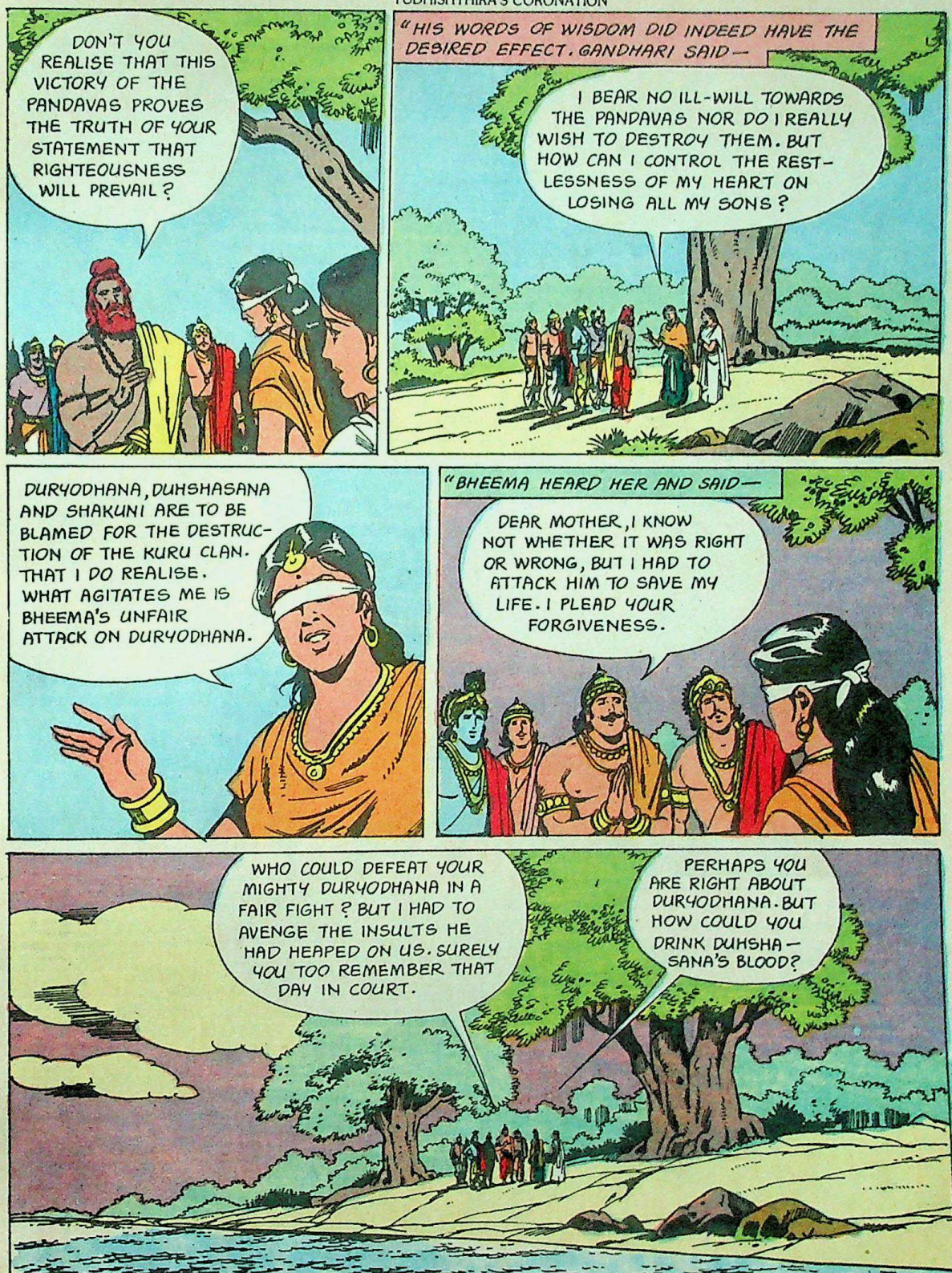

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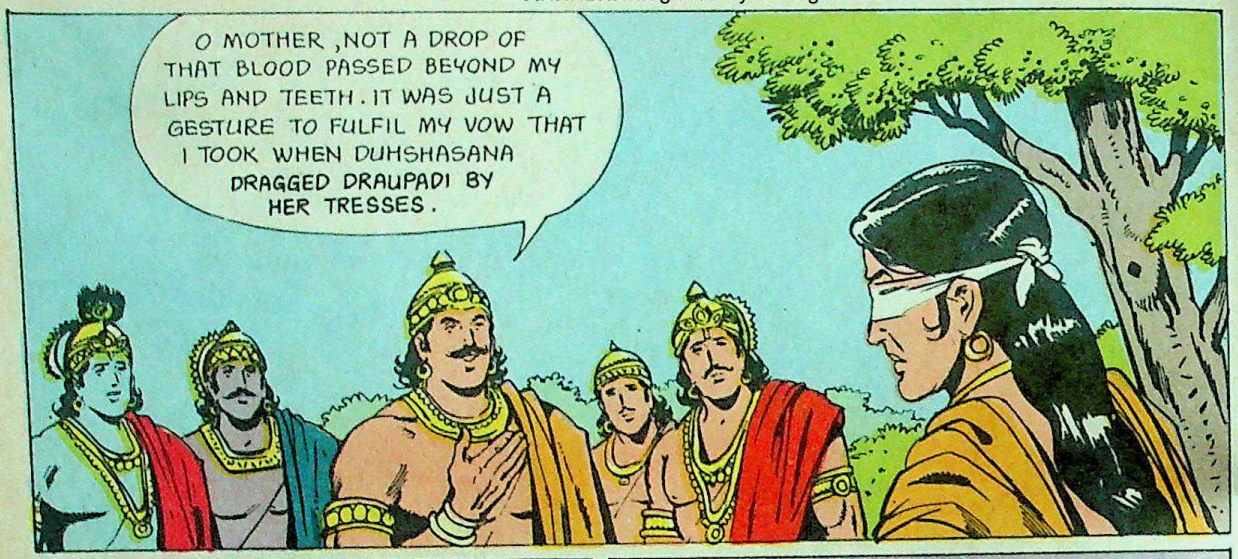

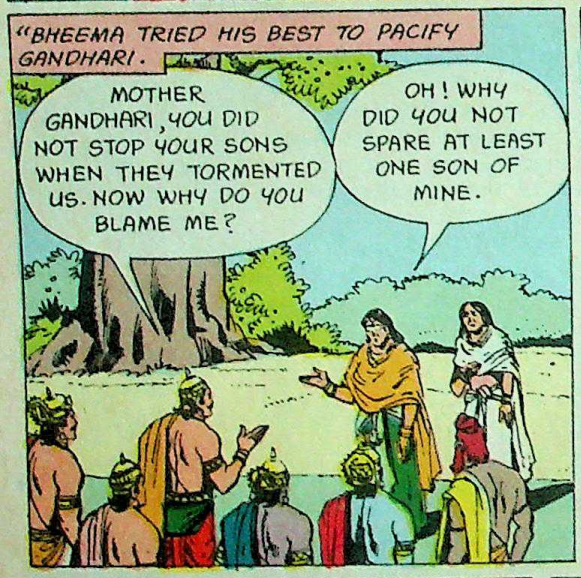

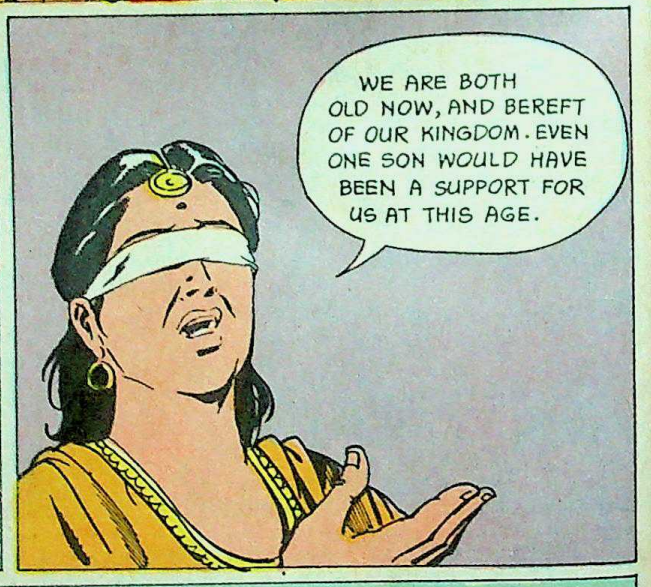

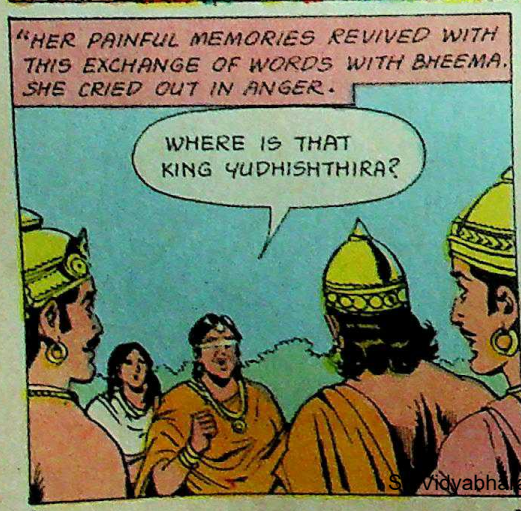

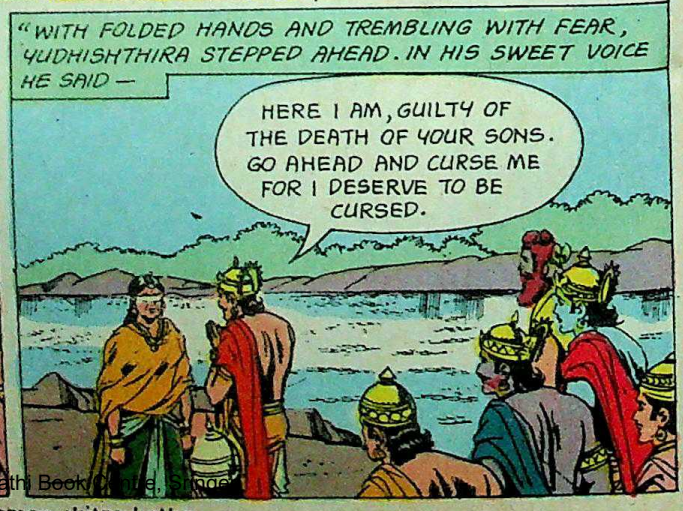

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"SEEING YUDHISHTHIRA SO PENITENT, GANDHARI'S ANGER VANISHED. SHE BEGAN INSTEAD TO SOB AND SIGH ALOUD.

"AS YUDHISHTHIRA STOOD BOWING BEFORE HER, GANDHARI'S BURNING GAZE FELL ON THE TIP OF HIS TOES.

"SO INTENSE WAS THE POWER OF HER GAZE, THAT YUDHISHTHIRA'S BEAUTIFUL TOENAILS CHARRED THAT VERY INSTANT.

"AT THIS, ARJUNA BECAME AGITATED AND NOT KNOWING WHAT WAS TO BE DONE, QUICKLY HID BEHIND LORD KRISHNA IN FEAR.

"FROM BEHIND HER BLINDFOLD, GANDHARI COULD PERCEIVE HIS FLURRIED ACTION. THAT THE BRAVE ARJUNA COULD BE SO FEARFUL AND DESPERATE MADE GANDHARI'S TEMPER TURN TO MATERNAL CONCERN.

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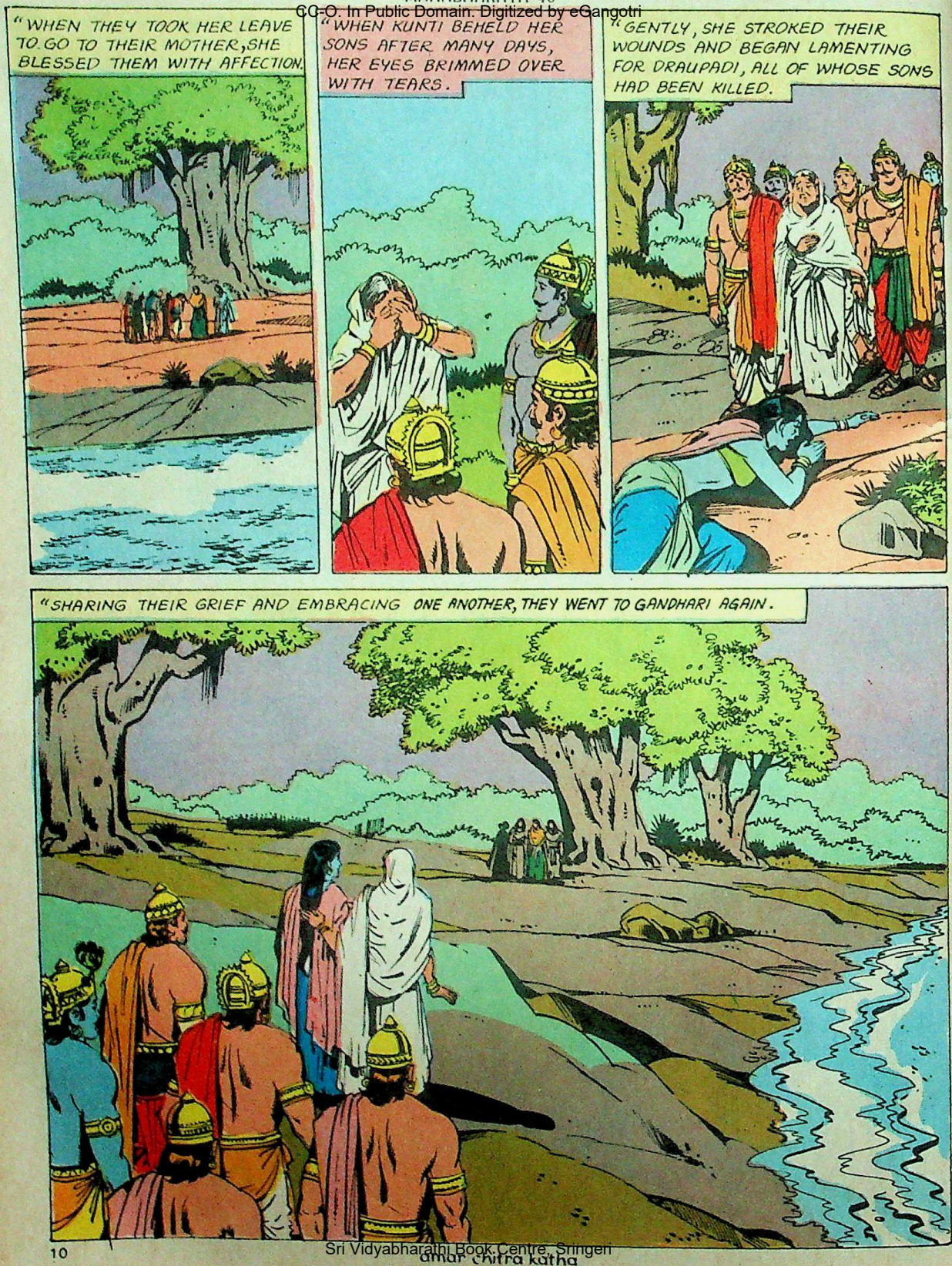

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"GANDHARI SAID TO DRAUPADI —

COME, DEAR DAUGHTER. SHED YOUR SORROW NOW. WHATEVER HAPPENED WAS INEVITABLE. I TOO HAVE THE SAME FEELING AS YOU HAVE. MY PLIGHT IS SIMILAR TO YOURS. WHO THEN WILL CONSOLE US?

"AS THEY ALL MADE THEIR WAY TO THE SITE OF THE BATTLE, GANDHARI BEHELD THE SCENE WITH HER DIVINE VISION.

"IT WAS INDEED A GRUESOME SIGHT WITH COUNTLESS BODIES STREWN ALL OVER.

"WIVES AND MOTHERS OF THE FALLEN SOLDIERS WERE SEEN WEEPING AND CRYING.

"AMIDST THEIR HEART-RENDING CRIES, GANDHARI SPOKE TO KRISHNA —

BEHOLD, O KRISHNA, THESE BEREAVED WOMEN RUNNING HERE AND THERE IN SORROW AND CONFUSION.

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"WHEN SHE SAW DURYODHANA, GANDHARI COLLAPSED LIKE A FELLED TREE.

"ON RECOVERING, SHE HELD HIS LIFELESS FORM IN HER ARMS AND CRIED OUT.

OH, MY SON! OH, MY SON!

"KRISHNA STOOD BESIDE HER IN SILENCE. GANDHARI POINTED TO HIM THE VARIOUS WOEFUL SIGHTS.

SEE HOW DURYODHANA'S WIFE IS TORN BETWEEN GRIEF FOR HER SON AND FOR HER HUSBAND.

BEHOLD UTTARA LAMENTING THE DEATH OF HER BRAVE, YOUNG HUSBAND, ABHIMANYU. POOR THING, THEY WERE MARRIED JUST SIX MONTHS AGO.

"AS SHE DESCRIBED THE SCENES AROUND, GANDHARI'S ANGER SUDDENLY FLARED UP.

YOU, KRISHNA, ARE TO BE BLAMED FOR ALL THIS. HOW COULD YOU WATCH THE PANDAVAS AND KAURAVAS DESTROY EACH OTHER WHEN YOU COULD HAVE EASILY PREVENTED THEM.

YOU MUST ATONE FOR IT NOW. WITH ALL THE POWERS ATTAINED BY MY PENANCE, I CURSE YOU...

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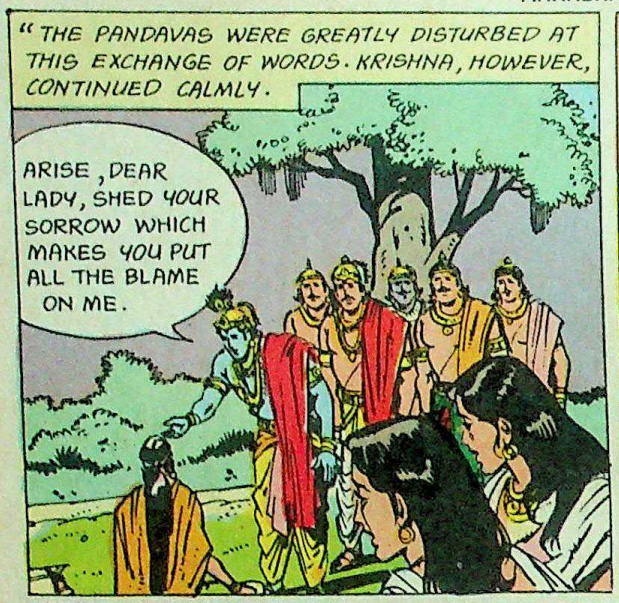
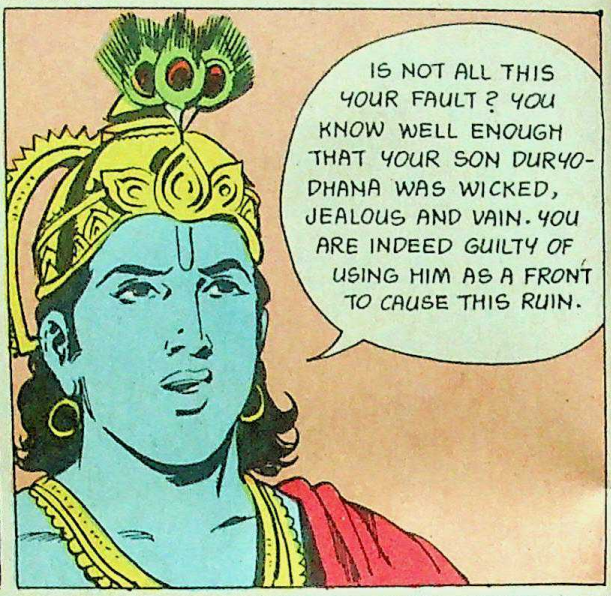
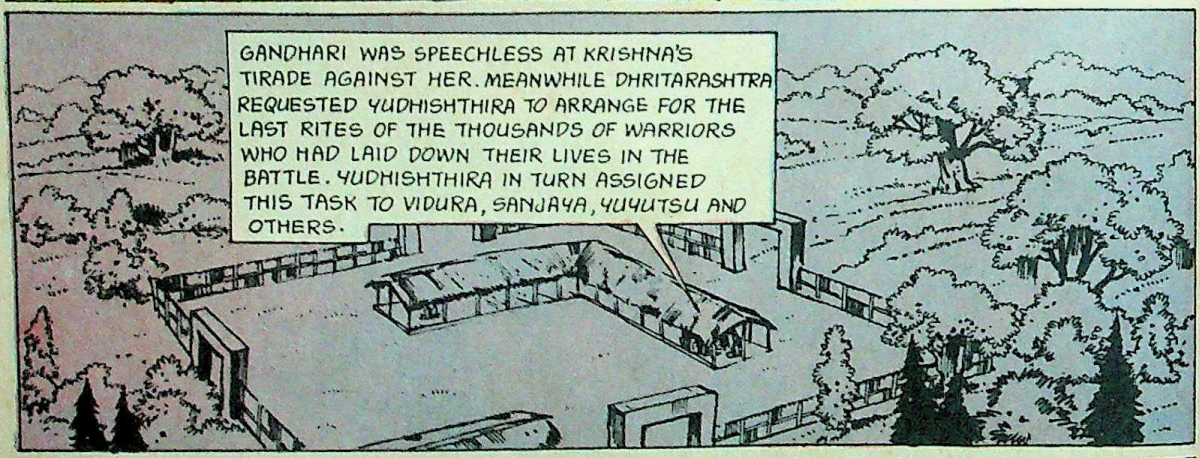
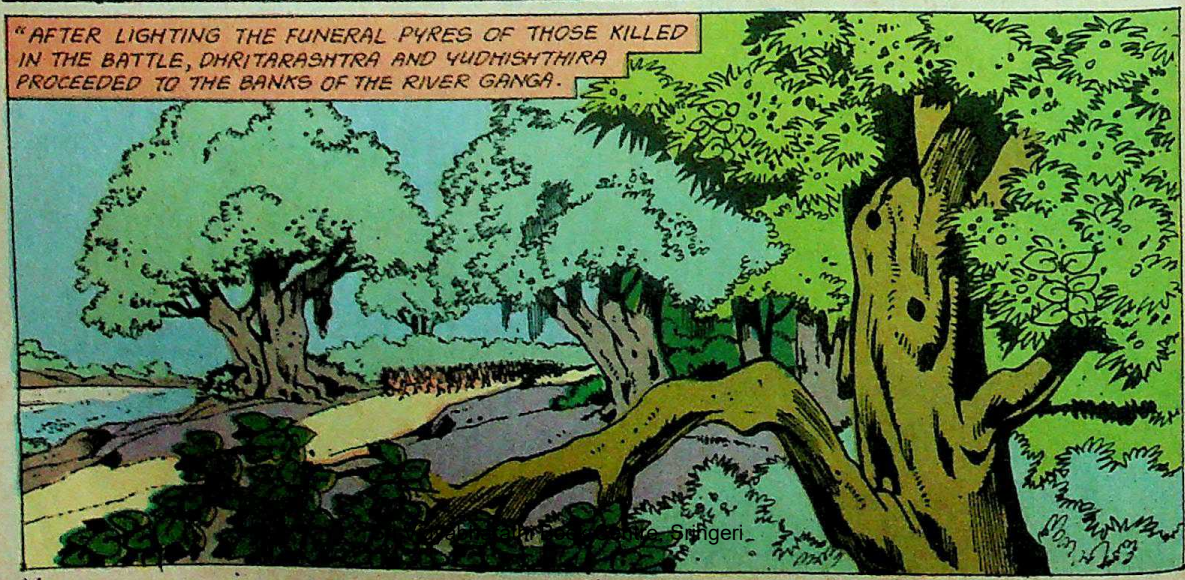

"THE PANDAVAS WERE GREATLY DISTURBED AT THIS EXCHANGE OF WORDS. KRISHNA, HOWEVER, CONTINUED CALMLY.
ARISE, DEAR LADY, SHED YOUR SORROW WHICH MAKES YOU PUT ALL THE BLAME ON ME.


IS NOT ALL THIS YOUR FAULT? YOU KNOW WELL ENOUGH THAT YOUR SON DURYODHANA WAS WICKED, JEALOUS AND VAIN. YOU ARE INDEED GUILTY OF USING HIM AS A FRONT TO CAUSE THIS RUIN.


GANDHARI WAS SPEECHLESS AT KRISHNA'S TIRADE AGAINST HER. MEANWHILE DHRITARASHTRA REQUESTED YUDHISHTHIRA TO ARRANGE FOR THE LAST RITES OF THE THOUSANDS OF WARRIORS WHO HAD LAID DOWN THEIR LIVES IN THE BATTLE. YUDHISHTHIRA IN TURN ASSIGNED THIS TASK TO VIDURA, SANJAYA, YUYUTSU AND OTHERS.


"AFTER LIGHTING THE FUNERAL PYRES OF THOSE KILLED IN THE BATTLE, DHRITARASHTRA AND YUDHISHTHIRA PROCEEDED TO THE BANKS OF THE RIVER GANGA.

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"THE MEN LAID ASIDE THEIR JEWELS AND SILKS TO OFFER OBLATIONS TO THE DEAD.

"THE WOMEN SHED COPIOUS TEARS AS THEY LIFTED THEIR PALMS TO OFFER OBLATIONS.

"JUST THEN, IN SOFT TONES, THE SORROWING KUNTI ADDRESSED HER SONS:

O PANDAVAS, THERE REMAINS ONE PERSON FOR WHOM YOU MUST MAKE OFFERINGS.

THE ONE WHO DEFIED ARJUNA, THE ONE WHO SHONE RESPLENDENT LIKE THE VERY SUN IN THE BATTLEFIELD, THE ONE WHO WAS UNRIVALLED IN STRENGTH AND VALOUR. KARNA, THE BRAVE: HIS RITES MUST BE PERFORMED BY YOU. HE WAS YOUR ELDER BROTHER. I GAVE BIRTH TO HIM, THE SON OF SURYA.

"THE PANDAVAS WERE ASTOUNDED TO HEAR HER SPEAK THUS. WITH A DEEP SIGH YUDHISHTHIRA ASKED HER —

HOW COULD KARNA BE YOUR SON, MOTHER? WAS HE REALLY OUR ELDER BROTHER?

HE WAS MY SON, DEAR YUDHISHTHIRA.

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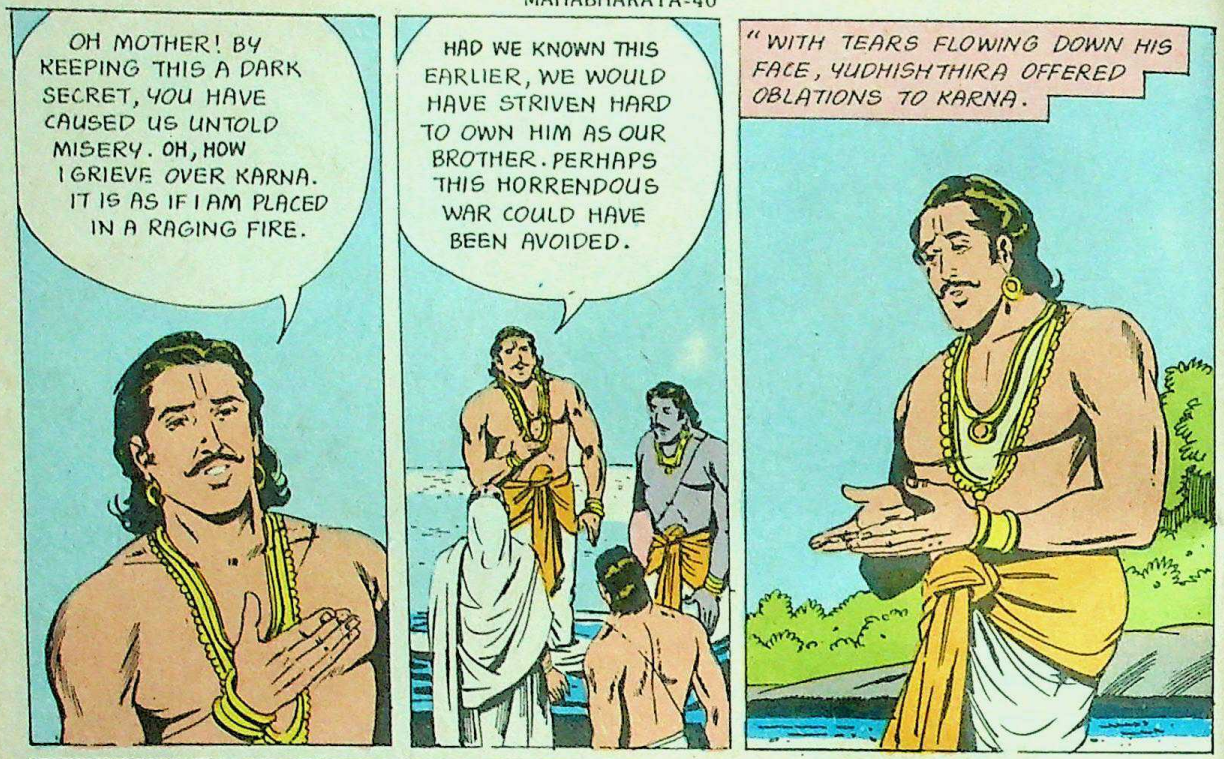

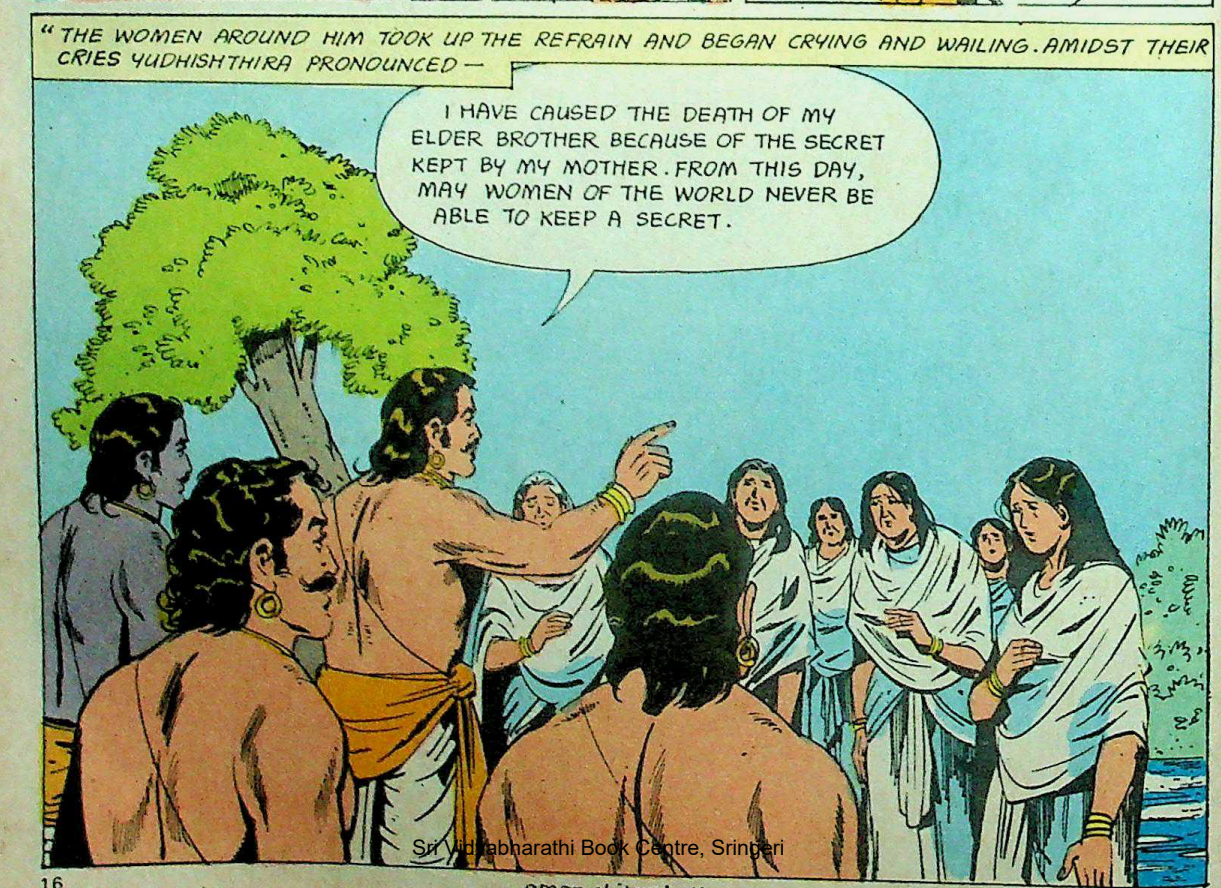

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"WITH THESE WORDS, YUDHISHTHIRA STEPPED OUT OF THE WATER, FOLLOWED BY HIS BROTHERS.

"AFTER THE FUNERAL RITES WERE OVER, THE PANDAVAS DECIDED TO STAY AWAY FROM THE CITY FOR A MONTH. SO THEY SET UP CAMP ON THE BANK OF THE GANGA AND LIVED THERE.

"AT THIS TEMPORARY ABODE, YUDHISHTHIRA WAS VISITED BY SEVERAL SAGES INCLUDING VYASA, NARADA AND KANVA.

"SEVERAL SCHOLARS, BRAHMANAS AND HOUSEHOLDERS CAME TO VISIT YUDHISHTHIRA AND CONSOLE HIM IN HIS GRIEF. NARADA SPOKE FIRST —

BY THE GRACE OF LORD KRISHNA AND THE VALOUR OF YOUR KINSMEN, YOU ARE NOW LORD OF THE EARTH. ARE YOU HAPPY NOW THAT YOU HAVE VANQUISHED YOUR FOES?

"YUDHISHTHIRA REPLIED —

INDEED THIS VICTORY HAS BEEN POSSIBLE DUE TO THE PROWESS OF SHRI KRISHNA AND THE VALOUR OF ARJUNA AND BHEEMA. BUT THE ONE SORROW THAT CONSTANTLY TORMENTS ME IS THAT MY DESIRE FOR THE KINGDOM CAUSED THE DEATH OF SO MANY DEAR ONES.

ANOTHER THOUGHT THAT BOTHERS ME IS THE REVELATION BY MY MOTHER KUNTI THAT KARNA WAS OUR ELDER BROTHER. EVEN UNKNOWINGLY, HOW COULD I HAVE MADE ONE BROTHER KILL ANOTHER?

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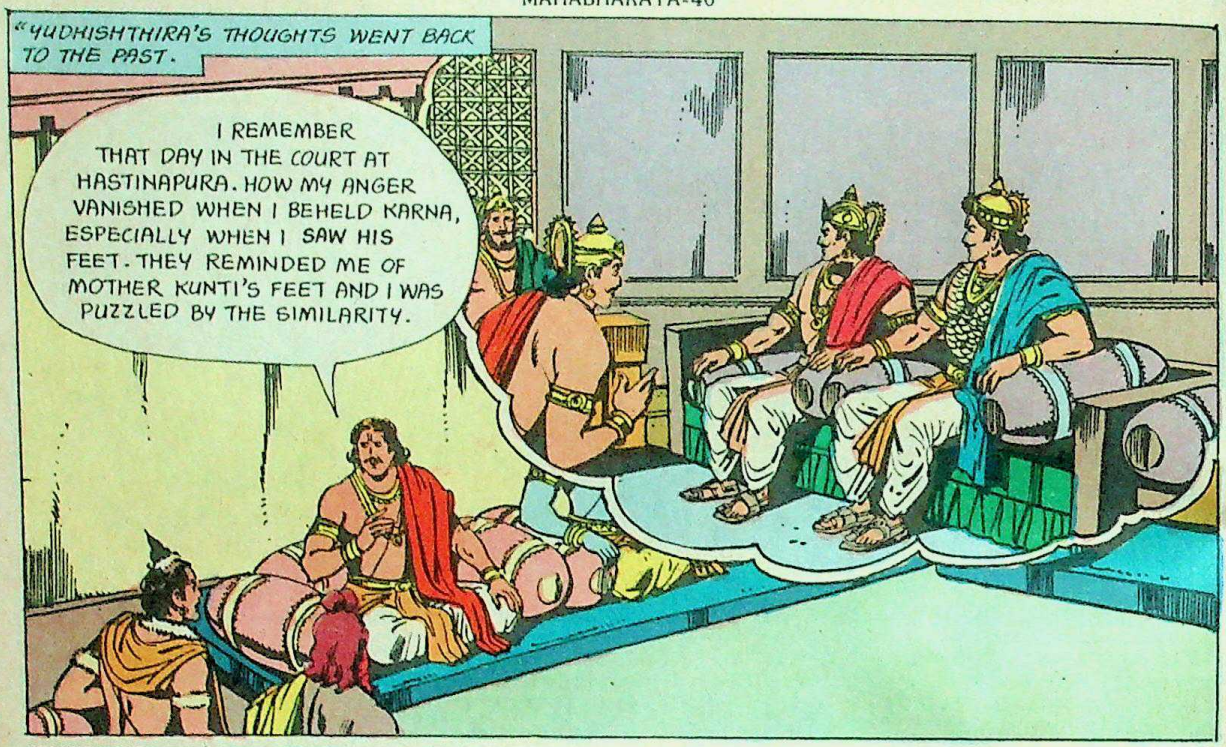

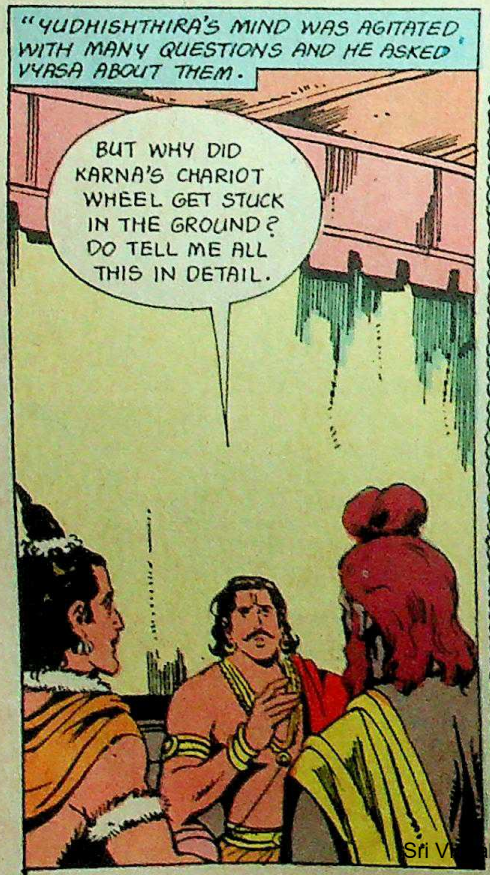

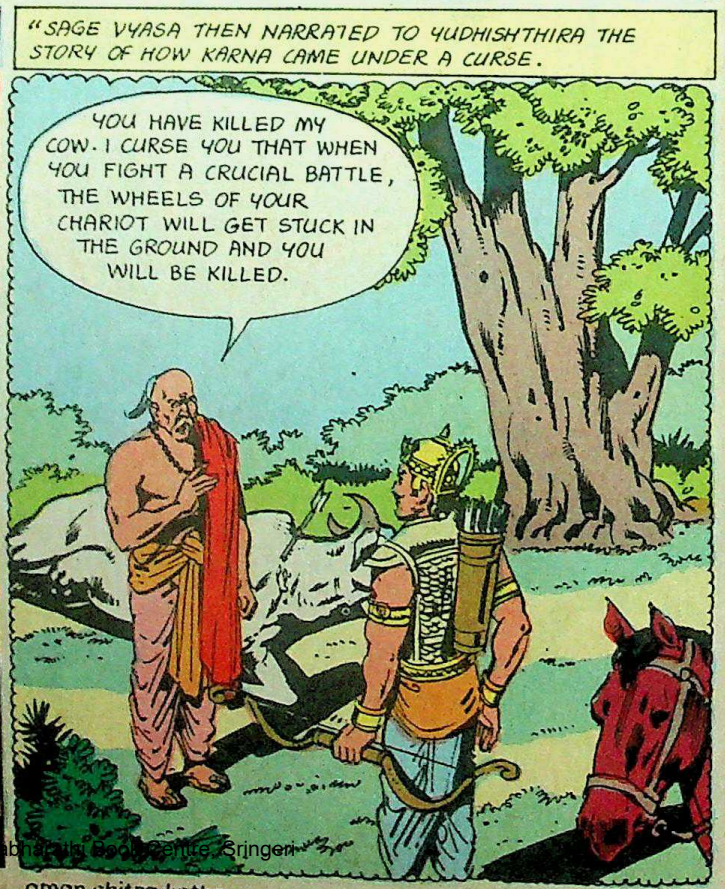

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"YUDHISHTHIRA WAS HOWEVER PLUNGED IN A DEEPER GLOOM ON HEARING THE STORY FROM VYASA. KUNTI COULD NOT BEAR TO SEE HIM SO DESOLATE.

O BRAVE YUDHISHTHIRA, DO NOT GRIEVE SO FOR KARNA. BELIEVE ME, BOTH HIS FATHER, SURYA, AND I HAD TRIED TO EXPLAIN TO HIM THAT YOU PANDAVAS WERE HIS BROTHERS.

"YUDHISHTHIRA WAS TOO AGITATED AND UNHAPPY TO BE THUS CONSOLED. REPEATING HIS EARLIER CURSE ON WOMEN, HE SAT THERE SIGHING DEEPLY.

"TURNING TO ARJUNA HE SAID IN A SAD VOICE —

WE SHOULD HAVE BEEN CONTENT TO BEG FOR OUR LIVING. OF WHAT USE WAS THIS WAR IN WHICH NEITHER WE NOR THE KAURAVAS HAVE ATTAINED THEIR OBJECTIVE.

ONE CAN ATONE FOR ONE'S SINS BY CONFESSING, BY GOOD DEEDS, BY GIVING CHARITY AND BY MEDITATION. LET ME THEREFORE GO TO THE FOREST. I LEAVE THIS KINGDOM IN YOUR CARE, O ARJUNA.

"ARJUNA WAS STARTLED AS ONE ACCUSED OF WRONG-DOING. THEN TAKING A THEATRICAL STANCE, HE STOOD UP TALL AND SMILING.

IT IS SURPRISING THAT YOU WISH TO ABANDON THE KINGDOM YOU HAVE ACQUIRED AFTER SO MUCH EFFORT.

IF YOU WANTED TO GO AROUND WITH A BEGGING BOWL, WHY DID YOU LET SO MANY KINGS DIE IN BATTLE? BEGGING FOR ALMS IS ALL RIGHT FOR BRAHMANAS, BUT IT DOES NOT BEFIT A KSHATRIYA LIKE YOU.

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DON'T DISCARD THIS HARD-EARNED WEALTH, O KING! THIS EARTH WHICH WAS RULED EARLIER BY DILIPA, NRIGA, NAHUSHA, AMBARISHA AND MANDHATA IS NOW IN YOUR CONTROL. COME PREPARE TO TAKE OVER THE REINS OF THE EMPIRE AND PERFORM THE ASHWAMEDHA YAJNA.

"BUT YUDHISHTHIRA WAS ADAMANT.

HEAR ME, O ARJUNA, I AM DETERMINED TO DWELL IN THE FOREST, EATING FRUITS AND ROOTS, WEARING DEERSKIN AND BARK AND WITH MY HAIR MATTED IN A KNOT. IN FASTING AND MEDITATION, I WILL SPEND MY REMAINING DAYS.

"BHEEMA, NAKULA AND SAHADEVA ALSO TRIED TO DISSUADE YUDHISHTHIRA FROM HIS RESOLVE, BUT HE REMAINED STUBBORNLY SILENT. THEN DRAUPADI ADDRESSED HIM IN HER SWEET VOICE —

LIKE THE "CHATAKA" BIRDS*, YOUR BROTHERS ARE REPEATEDLY BESEECHING YOU TO ACCEPT THE THRONE. WHY DON'T YOU LISTEN TO THEIR ENTREATIES?

THEY HAVE GONE THROUGH SO MUCH SUFFERING FOR YOUR SAKE. DID YOU NOT PROMISE THEM THAT YOU WOULD DEFEAT THE KAURAVAS IN BATTLE AND CONQUER THE EARTH? WHY DO YOU DISAPPOINT US NOW?

"THEN VYASA SPOKE TO YUDHISHTHIRA AT LENGTH. WITH INSPIRING TALES AND WISE COUNSEL, HE TRIED TO PERSUADE HIM TO RETURN TO THE CITY AND TAKE UP HIS DUTIES AS A KING.

Sri Vidyabharathi Book Centre, Sringeri

* A BIRD OF BLACKISH COLOUR REFERRED TO IN CLASSICAL POETRY

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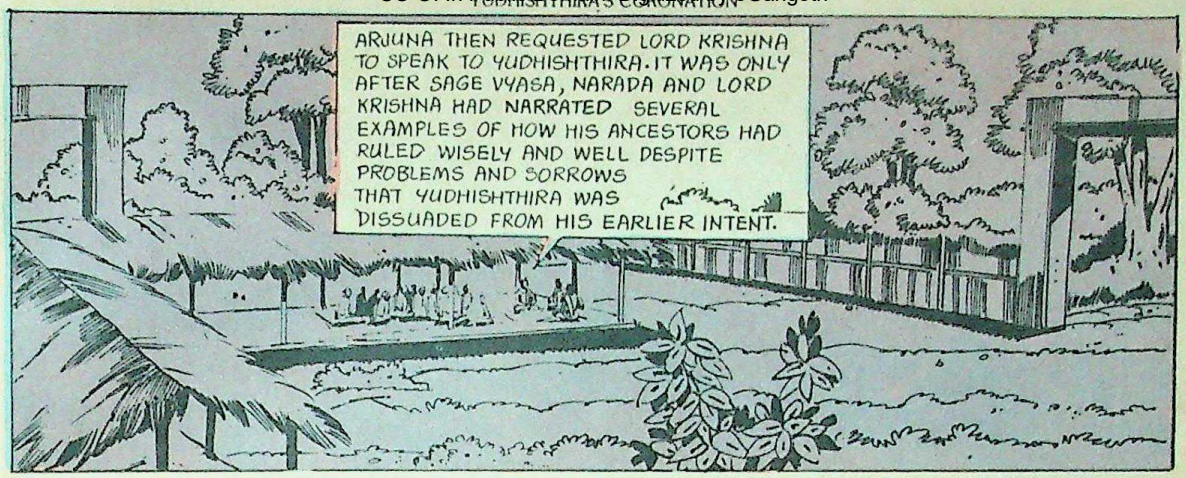

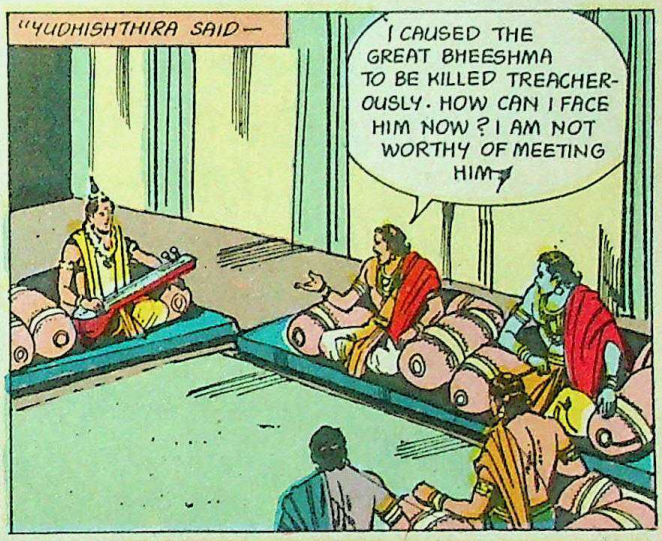

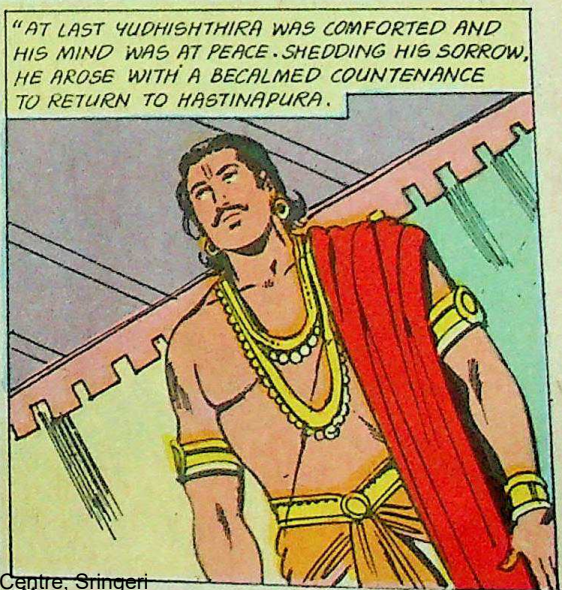

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" THEY RETURNED TO THEIR CAPITAL IN A MAGNIFICENT PROCESSION. AS THEY ENTERED THE GATES OF THE CITY, YUDHISHTHIRA MOUNTED A NEW CHARIOT DRIVEN BY SIXTEEN WHITE BULLOCKS, BHEEMA HELD THE REINS, AND ARJUNA A WHITE UMBRELLA, WHILE NAKULA AND SAHADEVA CARRIED CHAMARAS * ON EITHER SIDE OF THE KING. YUYUTSU, THE SOLE SURVIVING SON OF DHRITARASHTRA, FOLLOWED IN A WHITE CHARIOT. ON A GOLDEN CHARIOT WERE KRISHNA AND SATYAKI FOLLOWED BY A LONG RETINUE IN CHARIOTS AND PALANQUINS.

* WHISKS

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"THE CROWDS THRONGED THE CITY GATES TO WELCOME THE KING.

"AMIDST THE CHANTING OF VEDAS AND MUSIC AND THE WELCOMING CHEERS OF THE CITIZENS, YUDHISHTHIRA ENTERED THE CITY.

"THE STREETS WERE GAILY DECORATED WITH WHITE BANNERS AND STREAMERS AND THE AIR WAS FILLED WITH THE FRAGRANCE OF FRESH FLOWERS AND INCENSE.

"AT THE ENTRANCE TO THE PALACE, THEY WERE GREETED CEREMONIOUSLY BY THE BRAHMANAS.

"YUDHISHTHIRA WAS MADE TO SIT ON A BEAUTIFULLY ADORNED THRONE OF GOLD. FACING HIM WERE SATYAKI AND KRISHNA SEATED ON GOLDEN SEATS. FLANKING THE KING, SAT ARJUNA AND BHEEMA ON BEJEWELLED SEATS. NAKULA SAT ON AN IVORY THRONE WHILE KUNTI SHARED A SIMILAR SEAT WITH HER FAVOURITE SON SAHADEVA.

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"ON INSTRUCTIONS FROM KRISHNA, DHAUMYA, THE ROYAL PRIEST, CONSTRUCTED AN ALTAR AND REQUESTED YUDHISHTHIRA AND DRAUPADI TO SIT BESIDE IT.

"HOLDING ALOFT HIS CONCH-SHELL PANCHAJANYA, KRISHNA CEREMONIOUSLY POURED WATER ON YUDHISHTHIRAS HEAD.

"WHEN THE CORONATION RITES WERE COMPLETED, YUDHISHTHIRA GAVE AWAY A THOUSAND GOLD COINS TO THE PRESIDING PRIESTS.

"THEY IN TURN SHOWERED HIM WITH PRAISE AND FELICITATION.

"HAVING TAKEN OVER AS THE KING, YUDHISHTHIRA THEN SET ABOUT ALLOCATING DUTIES TO HIS BROTHERS AND OTHERS. HE APPOINTED BHEEMA YUVARAJA.

"THE WISE VIDURA WAS MADE MINISTER. SANJAYA WAS PUT IN CHARGE OF FINANCE, NAKULA WAS ENTRUSTED WITH THE MAINTENANCE OF THE ARMY OF WHICH ARJUNA WAS NOW THE COMMANDER. TO SAHADEVA HE SAID —

YOU, SAHADEVA, MUST BE MY PERSONAL PROTECTOR, AND BE BY MY SIDE AT ALL TIMES.

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"THE NEXT MORNING WHEN YUDHISHTHIRA WENT TO GREET KRISHNA, HE FOUND HIM IN A THOUGHTFUL MOOD. SAID YUDHISHTHIRA

DID YOU SPEND THE NIGHT PEACEFULLY? YOU, THE CAUSE OF OUR VICTORY, O KRISHNA, ARE YOU FEELING WELL?

"BUT WHEN HIS QUERIES WERE MET WITH A PENSIVE SILENCE, YUDHISHTHIRA WAS PUZZLED.

LORD, WHAT MAKES YOU SO THOUGHTFUL?

MY THOUGHTS ARE WITH BHEESHMA WHO IS LYING ON A BED OF ARROWS IN THE BATTLEFIELD.

"KRISHNA CONTINUED—

WHEN THE VENERABLE BHEESHMA ASCENDS TO THE HEAVENS, HIS VAST KNOWLEDGE TOO WILL VANISH. HURRY THEREFORE TO HIS SIDE AND ASK HIM ABOUT WHATEVER YOU WISH TO KNOW WITH REGARD TO YOUR TASKS AND DUTIES AS A KING.

"YUDHISHTHIRA SAID—

I WILL INDEED DO AS YOU BID.

"KRISHNA THEN ORDERED HIS CHARIOT TO BE MADE READY, ACCOMPANIED BY THE PANDAVAS, HE WENT TO THE BATTLEFIELD.

"LYING ON HIS BED OF ARROWS, BHEESHMA WAS SURROUNDED BY SEVERAL SAGES.

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"BOWING RESPECTFULLY TO BHEESHMA, THE PANDAVAS TOO SAT BESIDE HIM. KRISHNA SAID—

IF A NEEDLE AS MUCH AS PRICKS ME, I CANNOT BEAR THE PAIN. HERE YOU LIE CALMLY WITH ALL THOSE ARROWS PIERCING YOUR BODY. YOUR STRENGTH IS INDEED AMAZING. THERE IS NO ONE LIKE YOU IN THIS WORLD.

"KRISHNA THEN EXPLAINED THE REASON FOR THEIR VISIT.

YUDHISHTHIRA IS GREATLY DISTURBED BY THE DEATH OF SO MANY OF HIS KINSMEN. CONSOLE HIM, O BHEESHMA, WITH YOUR WORDS OF WISDOM.

"BHEESHMA RAISED HIS HEAD A LITTLE ON HEARING KRISHNA'S WORDS, AND GREETED HIM RESPECTFULLY. KRISHNA SAID—

NOW ONLY FIFTY-SIX DAYS REMAIN BEFORE YOUR SOUL ASCENDS TO HEAVEN. WITH YOU, ALL YOUR KNOWLEDGE TOO WILL DISAPPEAR. THEREFORE ALL THESE PEOPLE HAVE COME TO BE ENLIGHTENED BY YOU. WILL YOU INSTRUCT THEM IN DHARMA,* ARTHA** AND YOGA?

"BHEESHMA REPLIED WITH DUE MODESTY.

HOW CAN I TALK OF THESE THINGS WHILE YOU, THE ABODE OF ALL KNOWLEDGE, ARE PRESENT HERE? BESIDES, MY WOUNDS ARE CAUSING ME IMMENSE PAIN AND I FEEL DRAINED OF ALL MY STRENGTH.

"KRISHNA THEN BLESSED HIM.

FROM NOW ON YOU WILL FEEL NO PAIN OR WEAKNESS. NEITHER HUNGER NOR THIRST WILL BOTHER YOU. YOUR MIND WILL BE UNCLOUDED AND YOUR BRAIN ALERT.

"WITH THESE WORDS, KRISHNA AND THE PANDAVAS TOOK LEAVE OF BHEESHMA.

* DUTY

** ECONOMICS

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"EARLY NEXT MORNING, DISPENSING WITH THEIR RETINUE OF SOLDIERS, THE PANDAVAS FOLLOWED KRISHNA TO THE BATTLEFIELD.

"NARADA, WHO WAS SEATED WITH THE OTHER RISHIS WHO WERE AROUND BHEESHMA, SAID —

YUDHISHTHIRA, PUT YOUR QUERIES AND DOUBTS BEFORE BHEESHMA. YOU MUST BE QUICK BECAUSE HE HAS VERY LITTLE TIME LEFT.

"AS THE SAGE SPOKE THUS, ALL THE PEOPLE SURROUNDING BHEESHMA DREW CLOSER, BUT NONE DARED TO SPEAK. THEN YUDHISHTHIRA SAID —

O KRISHNA, YOU ALONE CAN BEGIN THIS DISCUSSION ON OUR BEHALF.

"AFTER GREETING HIM WITH DUE RESPECT, KRISHNA REQUESTED BHEESHMA —

O BHEESHMA, YUDHISHTHIRA AND HIS BROTHERS ARE EAGER TO HEAR YOU SPEAK.

"BHEESHMA REPLIED —

YUDHISHTHIRA MAY ADDRESS HIS QUERIES TO ME ONE BY ONE. I WILL BE HAPPY TO TEACH HIM ALL I KNOW.

"KRISHNA SAID —

YUDHISHTHIRA IS TOO EMBARRASSED AND SCARED TO FACE YOU.

BUT SURELY HE HAS DONE NO WRONG. IT IS THE DUTY OF EVERY KSHATRIYA TO KILL HIS ENEMIES.

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OVERWHELMED BY THESE WORDS, YUDHISHTHIRA TOUCHED BHEESHMA'S FEET RESPECTFULLY.

SIT DOWN, SON. DO NOT BE AFRAID. ASK ME ANYTHING YOU WANT.

"YUDHISHTHIRA SAID —

THE DUTIES OF A KING ARE SAID TO BE OF THE HIGHEST ORDER. PLEASE DESCRIBE THEM TO ME.

"BHEESHMA BEGAN —

A KING SHOULD DULY HONOUR THE DEVAS AND THE BRAHMANAS. HE SHOULD BE A MAN OF ACTION AND ALWAYS STRIVE FOR TRUTH. HE SHOULD BE JUST, HUMBLE, STRAIGHT FORWARD AND RIGHTEOUS...

"FOR LONG DID THE WISE BHEESHMA SPEAK TO YUDHISHTHIRA, ABOUT THE DUTIES OF A KING. THE SUN WAS ABOUT TO SET IN THE WEST, YET BHEESHMA'S NARRATION WAS NOT YET OVER. SUMMING UP HIS DAY-LONG DISCOURSE HE SAID —

THIS IS THE MERE ESSENCE OF KINGLY DUTIES. ASK ME ANY QUESTIONS YOU WANT, O YUDHISHTHIRA.

THANK YOU, O GRANDSIRE. THE SUN IS ABOUT TO SET AND I MUST TAKE YOUR LEAVE FOR TODAY.

"THE NEXT MORNING THE PANDAVAS EAGERLY RUSHED BACK TO BHEESHMA. YUDHISHTHIRA SAID —

COULD YOU EXPLAIN TO ME THE MEANING OF THE WORD 'RAJAN'. WHY IS A KING NECESSARY?

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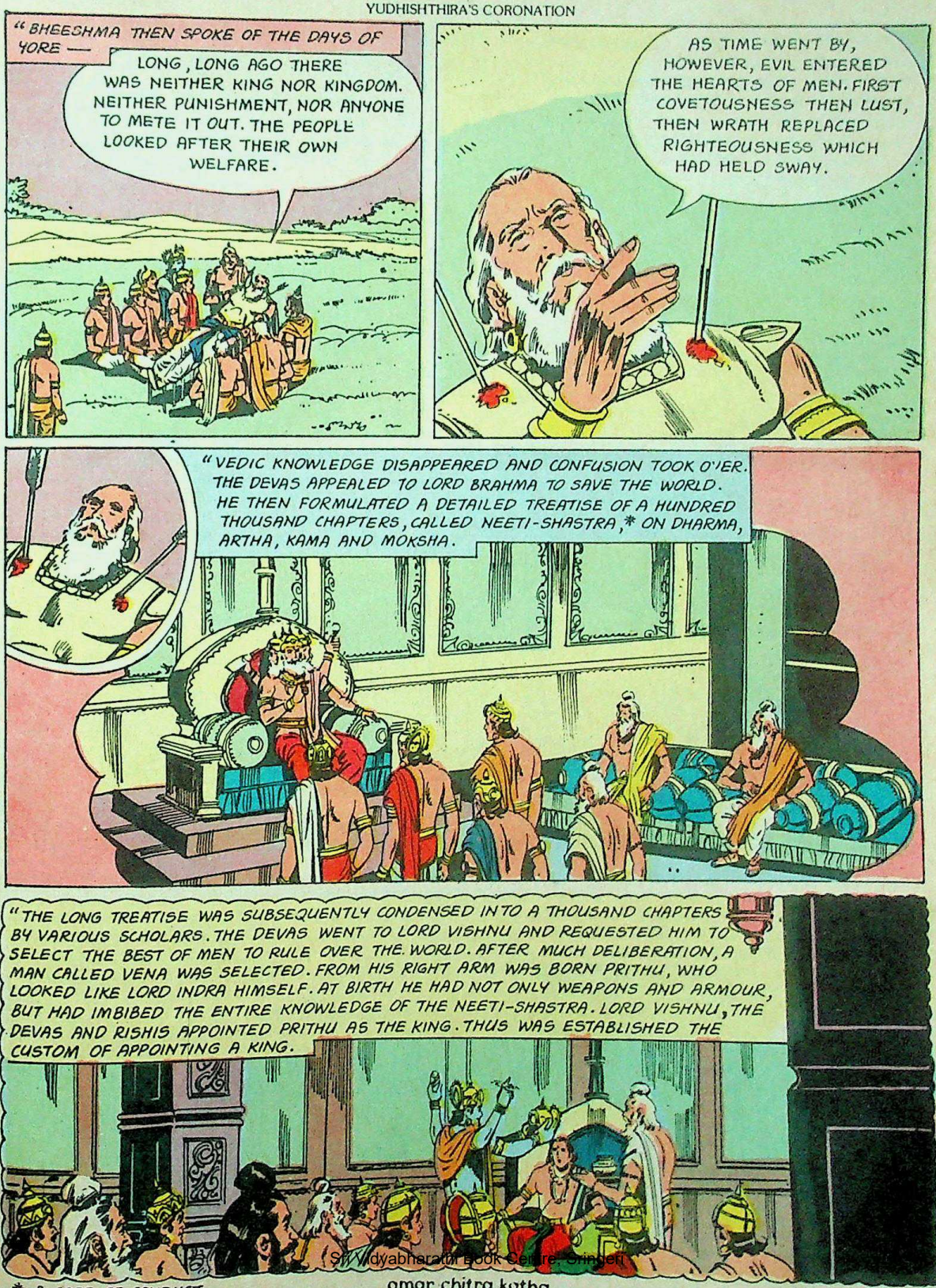

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* A CODE OF CONDUCT

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* THIS INSTRUCTION OF BHEESHMA TO KING YUDHISHTHIRA IS THE FAMOUS SHANTIPARVA OF MAHABHARATA

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"BHEESHMA OPENED HIS WEARY EYES AND SAID —

IT IS FORTUNATE THAT YOU HAVE ARRIVED HERE IN TIME. I HAVE BEEN LYING FOR FIFTY-EIGHT DAYS ON THIS BED OF SHARP ARROWS, BUT I FEEL I HAVE BEEN HERE FOR A HUNDRED YEARS. AT LONG LAST, THE SUN HAS TURNED HIS CHARIOT TOWARDS THE NORTH.

"TURNING TO DHRITARASHTRA, HE SAID —

WISE AND LEARNED AS YOU ARE, DO NOT GRIEVE OVER YOUR SONS. WHATEVER HAPPENED WAS INEVITABLE. CONSIDER THE PANDAVAS TO BE YOUR OWN CHILDREN.

"BHEESHMA THEN ADDRESSED KRISHNA —

ALLOW ME, O LORD, OF THE UNIVERSE, TO LEAVE THIS BODY OF MINE.

I GRANT YOU YOUR WISH, YOU HAVE THE POWER TO SUMMON DEATH AT WILL.

"BHEESHMA'S FACE SHONE WITH AN ETHEREAL SMILE. WITH HIS YOGIC POWERS, HE WILLED HIMSELF TO DIE. THE ONLOOKERS BEHELD A STRANGE PHENOMENON. AS EACH PART OF HIS BODY BECAME LIFELESS, THE ARROWS THEREIN FELL OFF AND THE WOUNDS WERE HEALED. WHEN THE LIFE FORCE FINALLY ESCAPED THROUGH HIS SKULL, THE HEAVENS RESOUNDED WITH CELESTIAL MUSIC AND SHOWERED HIM WITH FLOWERS.

WITH DUE HONOUR AND CEREMONY, BHEESHMA'S BODY WAS CONSIGNED TO THE FIRE. THUS DID THE VENERABLE BHEESHMA MEET HIS END AT WILL AT THE END OF A LONG AND ILLUSTRIOUS LIFE.

THUS ENDS THE FORTIETH SESSION OF OUR RENDERING OF VYASA'S IMMORTAL ITIHASA MAHABHARATA.

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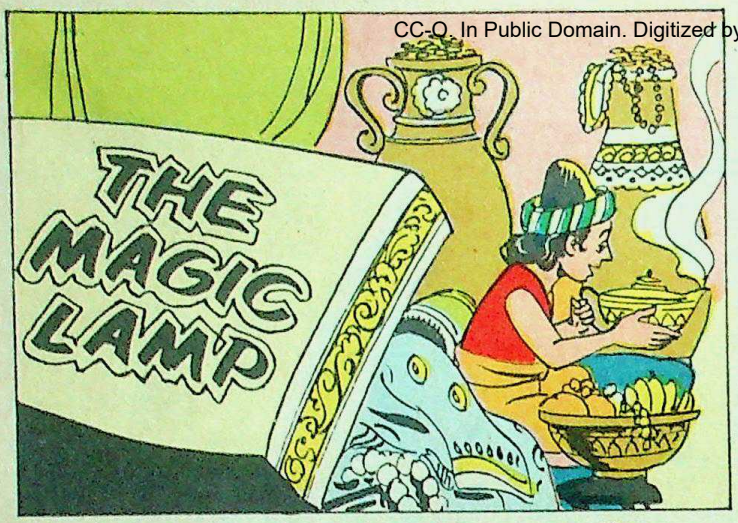

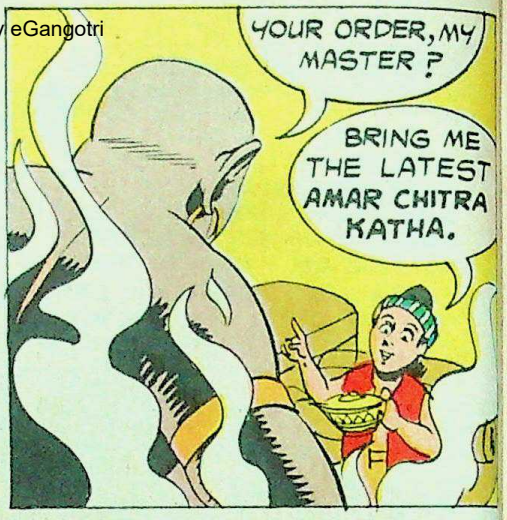

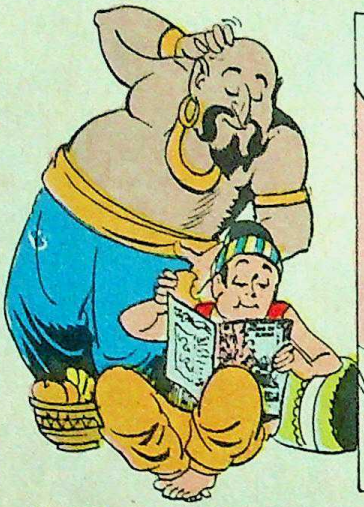

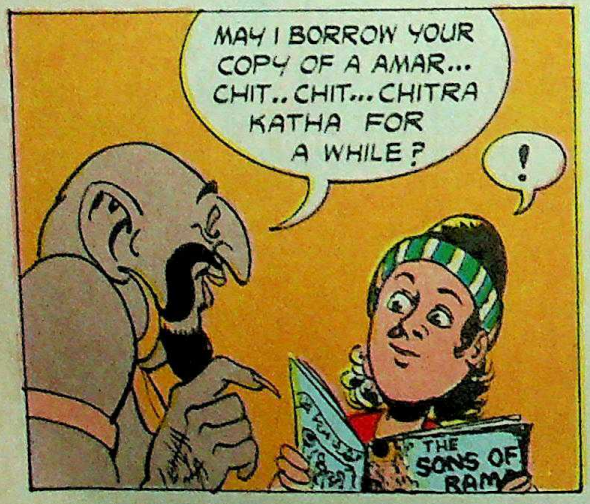

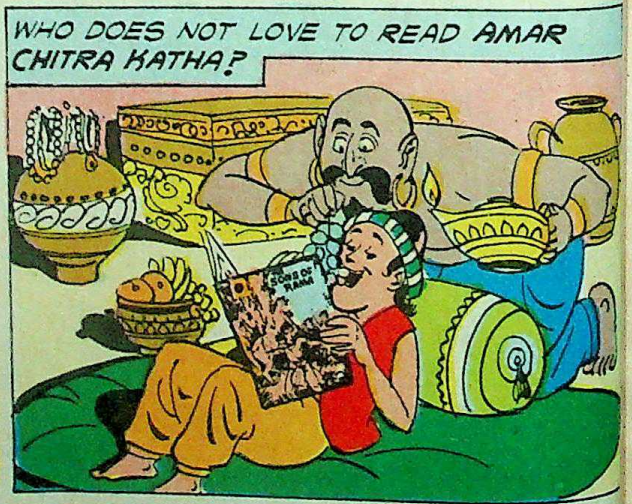

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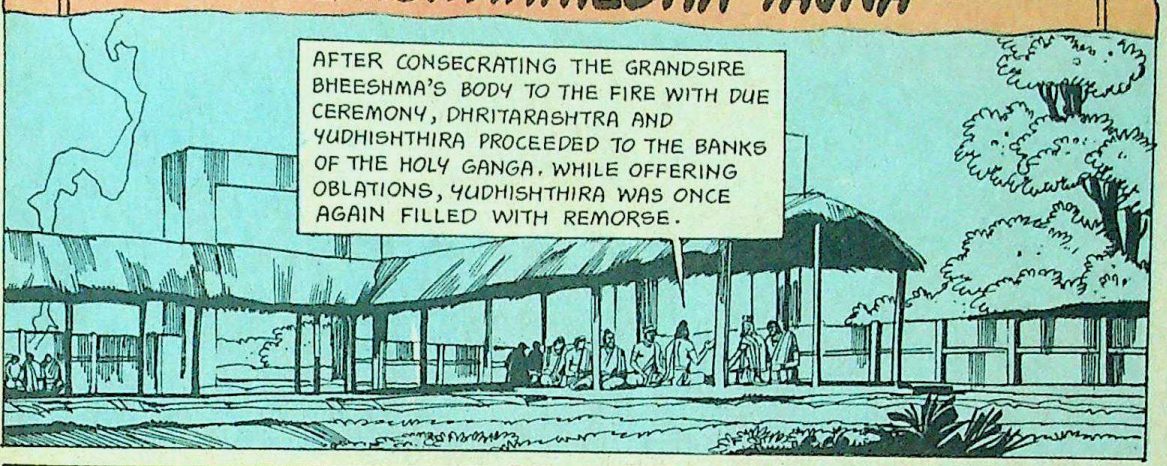
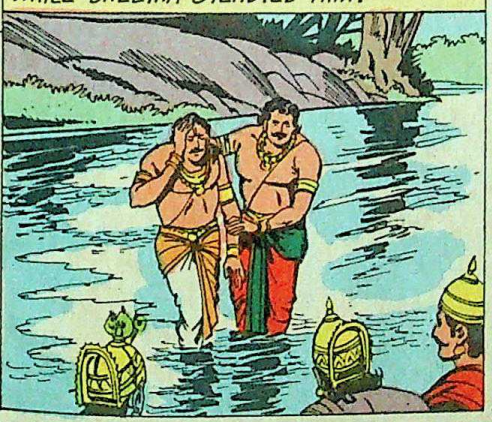
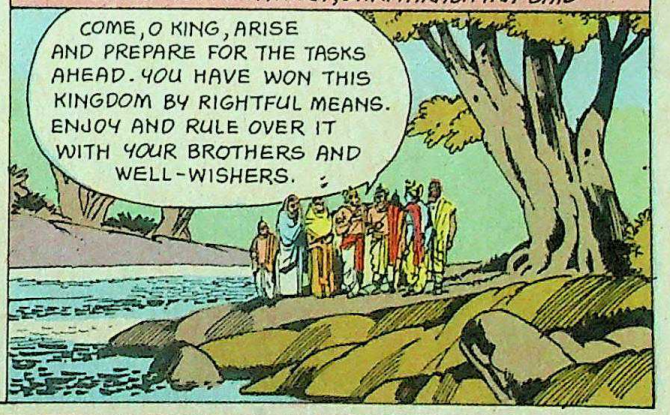
Mahabharata – 41
THE ASHWAMEDHA YAJNA

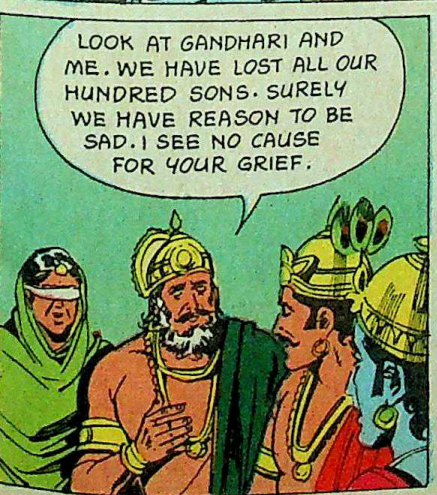


"SHATTERED BY GRIEF AND HIS EYES MOIST, HE STAGGERED OUT OF THE WATER WHILE BHEEMA STEADIED HIM.



"SEEING HIM SO DESPONDENT, THE OTHER PANDAVA BROTHERS TOO FELT HELPLESS AND FORLORN. ADDRESSING YUDHISHTHIRA, DHRITARASHTRA SAID —





"WHEN YUDHISHTHIRA DID NOT REPLY, KRISHNA SAID —

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"YUDHISHTHIRA SAID —

IT IS I WHO WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DEATHS OF BHEESHMA, DRONA AND KARNA. DO TELL ME HOW I MAY ABSOLVE MYSELF OF THIS SIN, O KRISHNA!

"SAGE VYASA THEN INTERVENED —

YOUR MIND IS STILL NOT AT REST, DESPITE THE LONG HOURS OF DISCUSSIONS YOU HAVE HAD. IS ALL OUR ADVICE IN VAIN? WHY DO YOU AGAIN AND AGAIN SINK INTO GLOOM?

HOWEVER, IF YOU ARE STILL GNAWED BY FEELINGS OF GUILT ABOUT THE WAR, I WILL SUGGEST A WAY TO PURIFY YOURSELF. PERFORM YAJNAS LIKE THE RAJASOOYA AND THE ASHWAMEDHA.

"YUDHISHTHIRA SAID —

NO DOUBT, THE ASHWAMEDHA YAJNA WILL SERVE TO PURIFY THIS ENTIRE EARTH. BUT I HAVE NO RESOURCES LEFT AT ALL. HOW CAN I UNDERTAKE THE YAJNA NOW?

"SAGE VYASA PONDERED FOR A WHILE AND SAID —

THERE IS A WAY OUT. FAR AWAY UNDER THE SLOPES OF THE HIMALAYAS LIES BURIED THE IMMENSE WEALTH OF KING MARUTTA. YOU MUST GO AND FETCH IT.

"YUDHISHTHIRA FELT PUZZLED.

BUT I DO NOT UNDERSTAND. HOW DID MARUTTA ACCUMULATE SO MUCH WEALTH? HOW CAN WE GET IT NOW?

I WILL TELL YOU THE STORY.

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"ONCE UPON A TIME, WHEN KING MARUTTA OF THE IKSHVAKU DYNASTY, PLANNED TO UNDERTAKE A YAJNA, HE REQUESTED BRIHASPATI TO BE HIS PRIEST.

I HAVE MADE ALL PREPARATIONS. DO ME THE HONOUR OF PRESIDING OVER THE SACRIFICE.

I AM NOW THE PRIEST OF LORD INDRA. HOW CAN I BE THE GURU OF MERE MORTALS? GO AND FIND SOMEONE ELSE.

"KING MARUTTA WAS ADVISED TO FIND BRIHASPATI'S BROTHER SAMVARTA, WHO, TIRED OF BRIHASPATI'S ENVY AND THE HARASSMENT CAUSED BY HIM, HAD RETIRED TO THE FOREST.

YOUR BROTHER BRIHASPATI HAS REFUSED TO PERFORM THE YAJNA FOR ME. WILL YOU KINDLY COME TO MY HELP AND PERFORM IT FOR ME?

"WHEN KING MARUTTA MADE THE REQUEST REPEATEDLY, SAMVARTA AGREED.

I WILL TELL YOU A WAY TO OBTAIN INEXHAUSTIBLE WEALTH TO PERFORM THE YAJNA. AT THE SAME TIME, I WILL TEACH INDRA AND MY BROTHER, BRIHASPATI, A LESSON.

GO AND PRAY TO LORD SHIVA IN THE MANNER I WILL TELL YOU NOW.

I WILL DO SO AT ONCE.

"KING MARUTTA OFFERED PRAYERS TO LORD SHIVA AND OBTAINED FROM THE GOD IMMENSE WEALTH AS A BOON.

"KING MARUTTA THEN PREPARED FOR THE SACRIFICE. CRAFTSMEN WERE APPOINTED TO MAKE GOLD VESSELS AND POTS FOR THE CEREMONY, AND A SACRIFICIAL HALL WAS BUILT IN THE HIMALAYAS.

Sri Vidyabharati Book Centre, Shimla

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"WHEN BRIHASPATI CAME TO KNOW OF THE WEALTH ACQUIRED BY KING MARUTTA, HE BECAME THIN AND WAN WITH ENVY. INDRA ASKED HIM —

WHAT TROUBLES YOU? ARE YOU NOT LOOKED AFTER WELL BY YOUR ATTENDANTS?

I HAVE HEARD THAT MY BROTHER, SAMVARTA, IS GOING TO CONDUCT KING MARUTTA'S YAJNA. IT IS SOMETHING I CANNOT TOLERATE.

"INDRA WAS SURPRISED.

BUT YOU ARE THE PRIEST OF THE DEVAS THEMSELVES. WHAT CAN SAMVARTA DO TO YOU?

AH! WHO CAN BEAR TO SEE AN ENEMY PROSPER. PLEASE HAVE KING MARUTTA AND SAMVARTA CAPTURED.

"INDRA THEN SENT MESSENGERS TO KING MARUTTA, OFFERING THE SERVICES OF BRIHASPATI AS THE PRESIDING PRIEST. BUT THE KING WOULD NOT CHANGE HIS MIND.

SAMVARTA ALONE SHALL BE MY PRIEST.

"ENRAGED, INDRA DECIDED TO USE HIS CELESTIAL WEAPON ON MARUTTA. THE KING BEGGED SAMVARTA TO PROTECT HIM.

FEAR NOT, O KING. NO ONE CAN HARM YOU WHILE YOU ARE IN MY PROTECTION. TELL ME YOUR HEART'S DESIRE AND I WILL HAVE IT FULFILLED.

"KING MARUTTA SAID —

MAY LORD INDRA AND OTHER DEVAS ATTEND THIS YAJNA OF MINE.

SO BE IT.

"WITH HIS POWER OF PENANCE, SAMVARTA WAS INDEED ABLE TO INVOKE INDRA AT THE SACRIFICE. PACIFIED BY SAMVARTA, THE LORD OF THE DEVAS PARTICIPATED IN THE RITES AND BLESSED THE KING.

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AFTER THE SACRIFICE WAS OVER, KING MARUTTA MADE GENEROUS GIFTS OF GOLD TO ALL THE BRAHMANAS. SO GREAT WAS HIS WEALTH THAT THERE STILL REMAINED ENOUGH TO FILL A BIG STOREHOUSE. LEAVING IT BURIED IN THE HIMALAYAS, KING MARUTTA RETURNED TO HIS CAPITAL. YOU MUST NOW ARRANGE TO FETCH THIS TREASURE FOR YOUR YAJNA.

"YUDHISHTHIRA'S GLOOM WAS DISPELLED BY THIS STORY AND HIS CHEER WAS RESTORED. TAKING ADVANTAGE OF HIS RECEPTIVE MOOD, KRISHNA SAID —

ONE WAR IS NOW OVER. WHAT REMAINS IS YOUR FIGHT WITH YOUR OWN SELF AND CONQUEST OF YOUR OWN MIND. ONCE YOU DO THAT, YOU WILL BE AT PEACE.

YOU MUST NOW PREPARE YOURSELF FOR THE PERFORMANCE OF SACRIFICES LIKE THE ASHWAMEDHA.

"YUDHISHTHIRA SAID —

I AM NOW AT PEACE WITH MYSELF. I WILL CERTAINLY DO AS YOU BID. SOON WE WILL GO TO THE HIMALAYAS.

"YUDHISHTHIRA AND HIS RETINUE RETURNED TO HASTINAPURA WITH DHRITARASHTRA LEADING THE WAY.

"PEACE AND PROSPERITY PREVAILED DURING KING YUDHISHTHIRA'S RULE. THE WELL-BEING OF THE PEOPLE WAS ASSURED, THERE WAS PLENTY EVERYWHERE AND THE CATTLE WERE CONTENTED.

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"ARJUNA AND KRISHNA REVELLED IN THE PEACEFUL SURROUNDINGS. TOGETHER THEY ROAMED THROUGH GARDEN AND GLADE, MOUNTAINS AND VALLEYS, REGALING EACH OTHER WITH TALES OF OLD. AFTER SPENDING MANY HAPPY DAYS IN EACH OTHER'S COMPANY, KRISHNA SAID —

HOW HAPPY AND TRANQUIL THESE PAST FEW DAYS WERE. BUT NOW I MUST TAKE YOUR LEAVE.

I MUST NOW RETURN TO DWARAKA. I HAVE NOT SEEN MY FATHER VASUDEVA FOR LONG. MY WORK HERE IS DONE. ALLOW ME TO GO, DEAR ARJUNA.

WILL YOU ALSO REQUEST YUDHISHTHIRA TO PERMIT ME TO LEAVE? I DARE NOT DO SO LEST I HURT HIS FEELINGS.

"WITH A HEAVY HEART, ARJUNA SAID —

AS YOU WISH, O KRISHNA. I WILL PERSUADE YUDHISHTHIRA TO ALLOW YOU TO GO.

"THE TWO FRIENDS THEN RETURNED TO HASTINAPURA AND TO THE PRESENCE OF DHRITARASHTRA.

"NEXT MORNING THEY WENT TO YUDHISHTHIRA'S PALACE.

I FEEL YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SPEAK TO ME.

O KING, KRISHNA HAS BEEN WITH US FOR SO MANY DAYS. HE NOW LONGS TO SEE HIS FATHER. ALLOW HIM TO GO TO DWARAKA.

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"YUDHISHTHIRA SAID —

INDEED HE MUST GO AND SEE HIS FATHER. YOU MAY LEAVE FOR DWARAKA TODAY, KRISHNA, IF YOU WISH. BUT DO NOT FORGET US WHEN YOU ARE THERE. YOU MUST ALSO RETURN HERE FOR THE ASHWAMEDHA YAJNA.

"AFTER BIDDING KUNTI, VIDURA AND OTHERS FAREWELL KRISHNA AND SUBHADRA LEFT HASTINAPURA.

"MEANWHILE ABHIMANYU'S YOUNG WIFE WAS STILL GRIEVING OVER HER HUSBAND'S DEATH. DIVINING HER STATE OF MIND, SAGE VYASA PAID HER A VISIT TO CONSOLE HER.

DO NOT GRIEVE SO. YOUR SON IS DESTINED TO BE A GREAT AND BRILLIANT KING.

"GOING TO YUDHISHTHIRA, SAGE VYASA SAID —

YOU MAY NOW PREPARE FOR THE ASHWAMEDHA YAJNA.

"RECALLING HIS EARLIER ADVICE, YUDHISHTHIRA PLANNED TO GO TO THE HIMALAYAS, CALLING HIS BROTHERS TOGETHER, HE SAID —

YOU TOO HAVE HEARD THE WISE COUNSEL GIVEN BY LORD KRISHNA AND SAGE VYASA.

OUR RESOURCES ARE DEPLETED. WE MUST GO AND FIND THE WEALTH LEFT BY KING MARUTTA, ABOUT WHICH SAGE VYASA TOLD US. WHAT DO YOU SAY, BHEEMA?

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"BHEEMA REPLIED —

I AM HAPPY TO HEAR THIS. WITH SHIVA'S BLESSINGS, WE WILL FIND THE TREASURE OF KING MARUTTA.

"WHEN ARJUNA, NAKULA AND SAHADEVA TOO SUPPORTED YUDHISHTHIRA'S DECISION, HE SAID —

LET PREPARATIONS BE MADE FOR US TO LEAVE FOR OUR JOURNEY ON AN AUSPICIOUS DAY.

"LEAVING YUYUTSU TO LOOK AFTER DHRITARASHTRA, GANDHARI AND KUNTI, THE PANDAVAS STARTED ON THEIR JOURNEY TO THE HIMALAYAS.

"CROSSING NUMEROUS RIVERS AND LAKES, FORESTS AND VALLEYS, THE PANDAVAS FINALLY REACHED THEIR DESTINATION.

"THEY SET UP CAMP IN A SUITABLE SPOT. YUDHISHTHIRA ASKED THE ROYAL PRIESTS —

WHICH DAY IS SUITABLE TO BEGIN OUR WORK?

TODAY IS A GOOD DAY TO BEGIN ANY IMPORTANT WORK. WE MUST ALL FAST TONIGHT IN PREPARATION FOR TOMORROW'S TASK.

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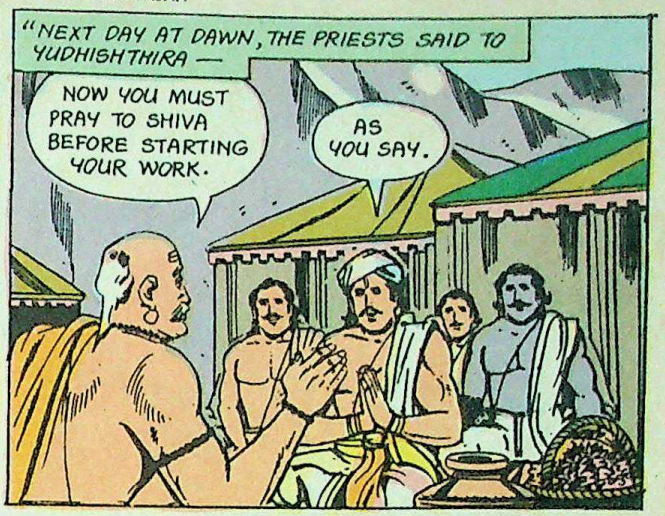

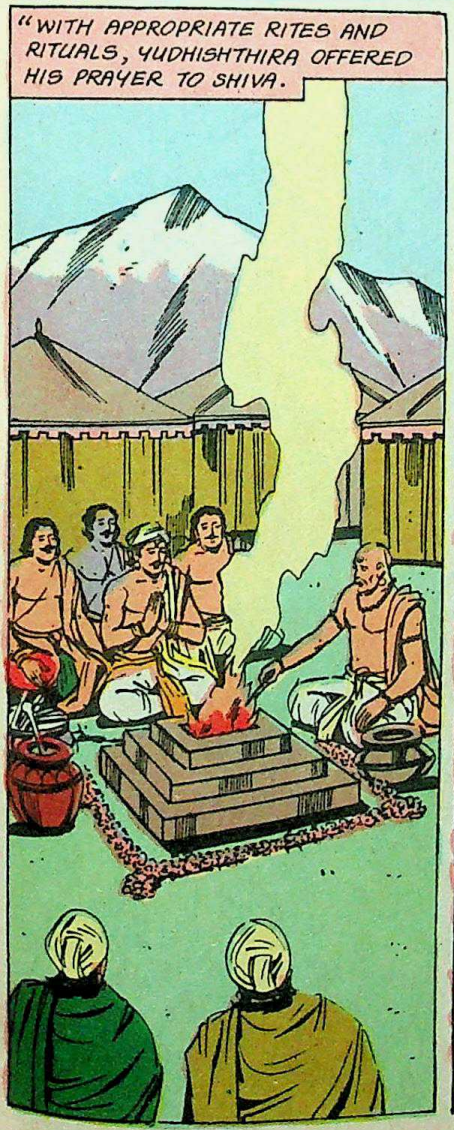

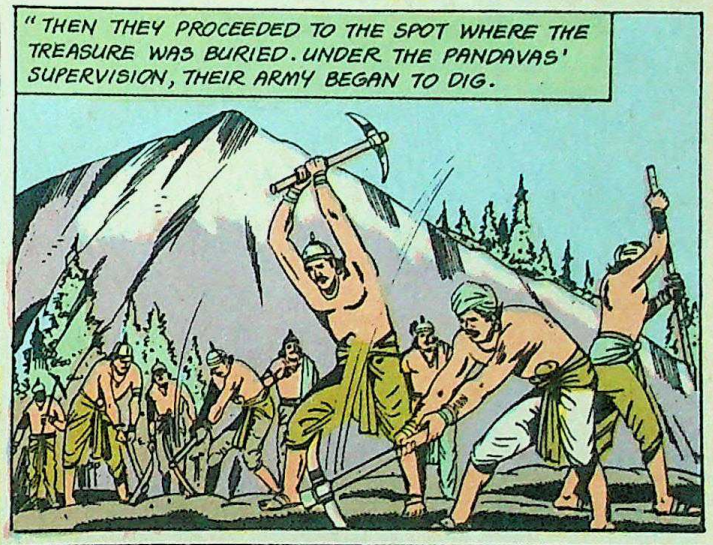

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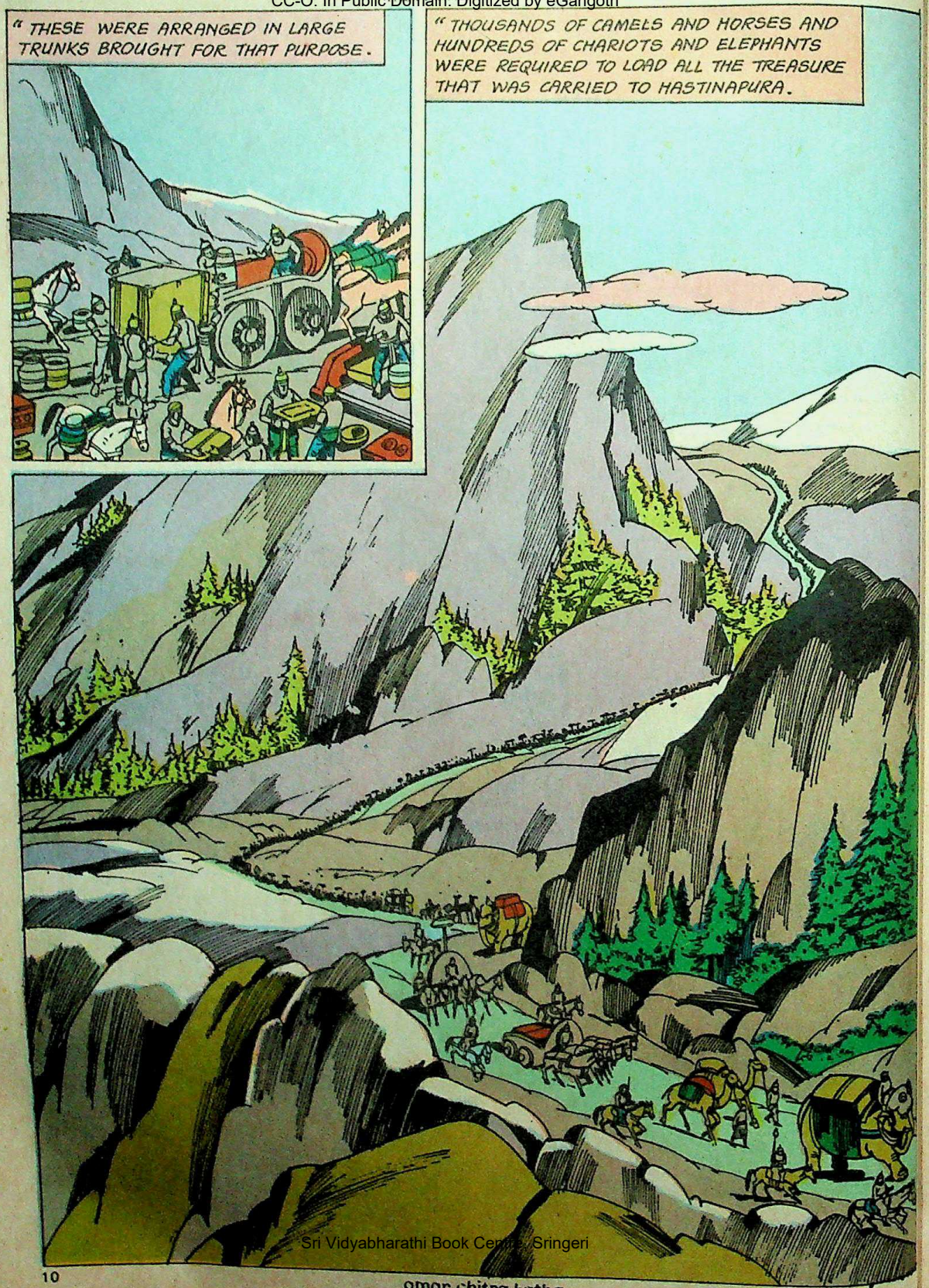

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"MEANWHILE, LORD KRISHNA AND HIS KINSMEN HAD ARRIVED AT HASTINAPURA FOR THE ASHWAMEDHA YAJNA.

DHRITARASHTRA AND VIDURA MADE ARRANGEMENTS TO WELCOME THEM.

"DURING THEIR STAY THERE, ABHIMANYU'S WIFE UTTARA GAVE BIRTH TO A SON. WHEN THE SHOUTS OF JOY FROM THE PALACE SUDDENLY TURNED TO A DISQUIETING SILENCE, KRISHNA RUSHED TO THE INNER CHAMBERS.

"HE SAW KUNTI RUSHING OUT.

O KRISHNA, YOU ARE OUR ONLY HOPE NOW. UTTARA'S SON IS STILL-BORN. BRING HIM ALIVE. REMEMBER YOUR VOW TO REVIVE HIM.*

"WHEN KRISHNA REACHED THE INNER CHAMBERS, HE SAW SUBHADRA, DRAUPADI AND OTHER WOMEN IN TEARS.

"DRAUPADI RUSHED TO UTTARA AND SAID —

HERE HE COMES, LORD KRISHNA HIMSELF.

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* ACK MAHABHARATA NO. 39

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"HER VOICE CHOKING WITH TEARS, UTTARA SAID TO KRISHNA —

I BESEECH YOU, O LORD, REVIVE MY SON. IT SEEMS THAT THE BRAHMASTRA+ OF ASHWATTHAMA HAS HAD ITS EVIL EFFECT.

"TAKING SOME WATER IN HIS CUPPED HAND, KRISHNA DECLARED —

UTTARA, MY DEAR, MY WORDS CAN NEVER GO WRONG. I WILL FULFIL MY VOW AND SAVE THE CHILD.

"NULLIFYING THE EVIL INFLUENCE OF THE BRAHMASTRA, HE SAID —

IF I HAVE ALWAYS ADHERED TO TRUTH AND DUTY, MAY THIS CHILD COME ALIVE.

"NO SOONER HAD KRISHNA MADE THIS DECLARATION, THAN THE NEW-BORN INFANT BEGAN TO STIR WITH LIFE.

"JOY AND HAPPINESS PERCOLATED THROUGHOUT THE PALACE.

HAIL KRISHNA, OUR SAVIOUR.

PRAISES BE SHOWERED ON THE LORD.

"JOYFULLY, WITH HER SON CRADLED IN HER ARMS, UTTARA BOWED TO KRISHNA WHO SAID —

HE IS BORN AFTER THE KURU RACE HAS BEEN DESTROYED. LET HIM BE CALLED PAREEKSHIT.*

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+ MAHABHARATA — 39 * PAREEKSHIN = DESTRUCTION

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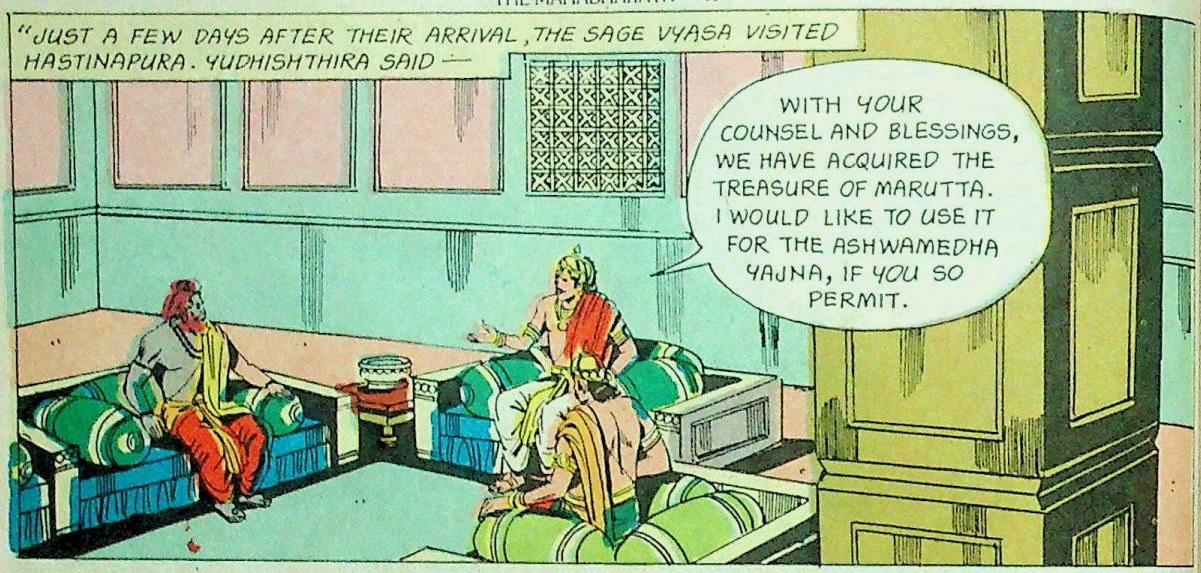

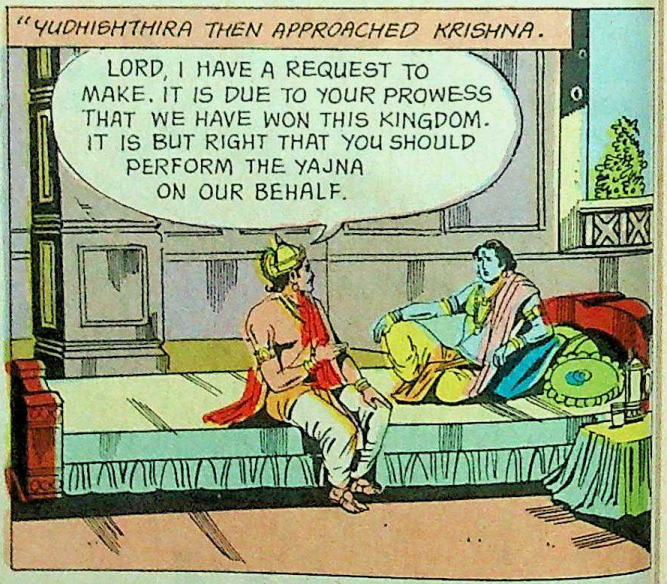

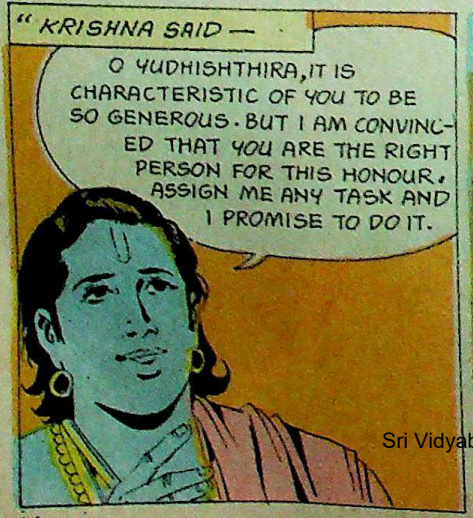

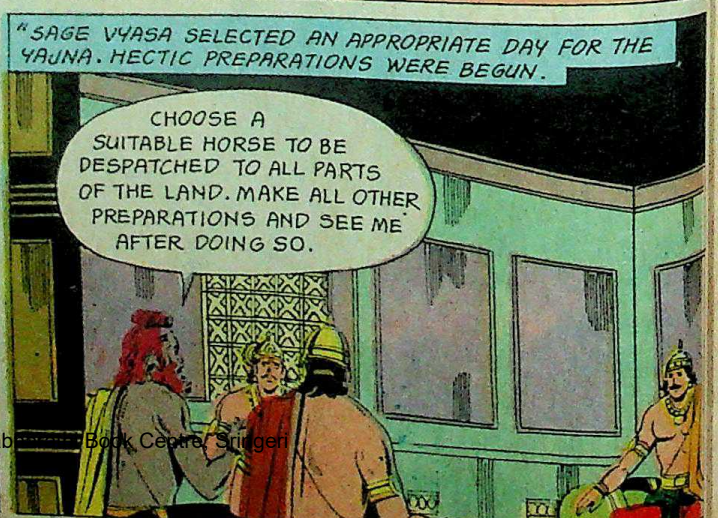

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"YUDHISHTHIRA DID AS HE HAD BEEN TOLD AND THEN CALLED FOR THE SAGE VYASA.

EVERYTHING IS NOW READY. HERE IS THE HORSE. TELL ME, WHO SHOULD ACCOMPANY IT?

ARJUNA IS THE ACE ARCHER. HE IS THE RIGHT CHOICE TO FOLLOW THE HORSE.

LET BHEEMA AND NAKULA ATTEND TO THE ROYAL DUTIES WHILE SAHADEVA LOOKS AFTER THE HOUSEHOLD.

"YUDHISHTHIRA SAID TO ARJUNA —

YOU, BRAVE ARJUNA, MUST GO WITH THIS HORSE. INVITE ALL THE KINGS FOR THE YAJNA. SHOULD ANYONE OBSTRUCT THE HORSE, OPPOSE HIM, BUT AVOID BLOODSHED AS MUCH AS YOU CAN.

"SAGE VYASA PERFORMED THE APPROPRIATE RITES AND SENT OFF THE SACRIFICIAL HORSE.

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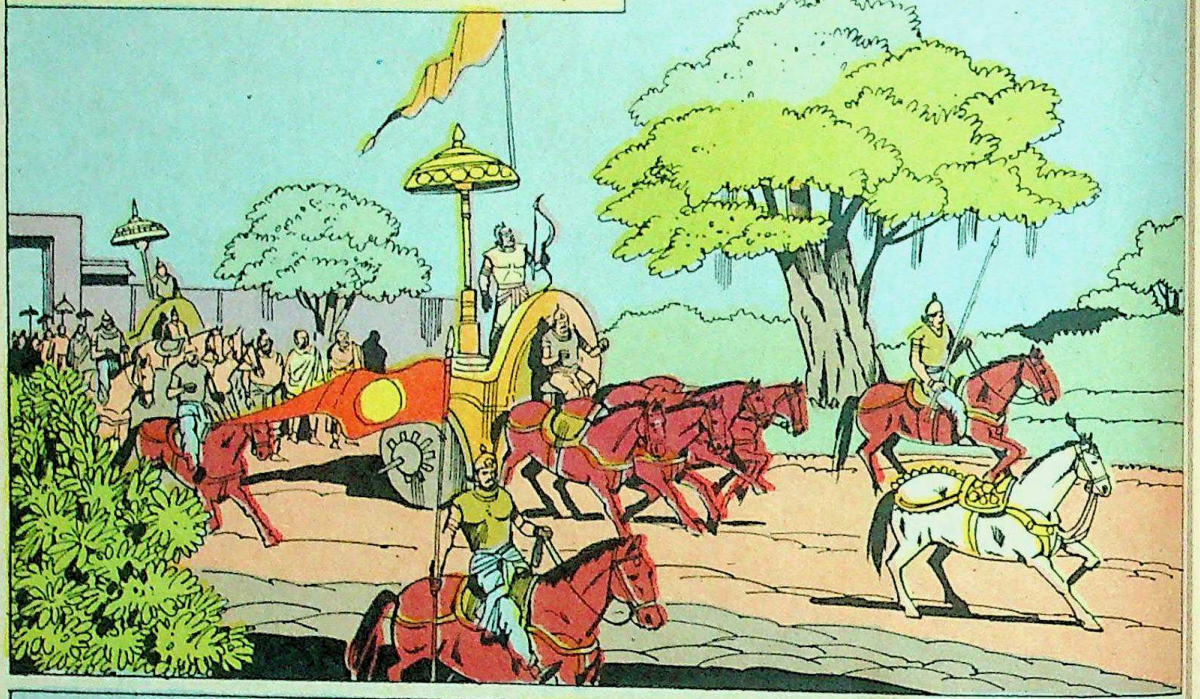
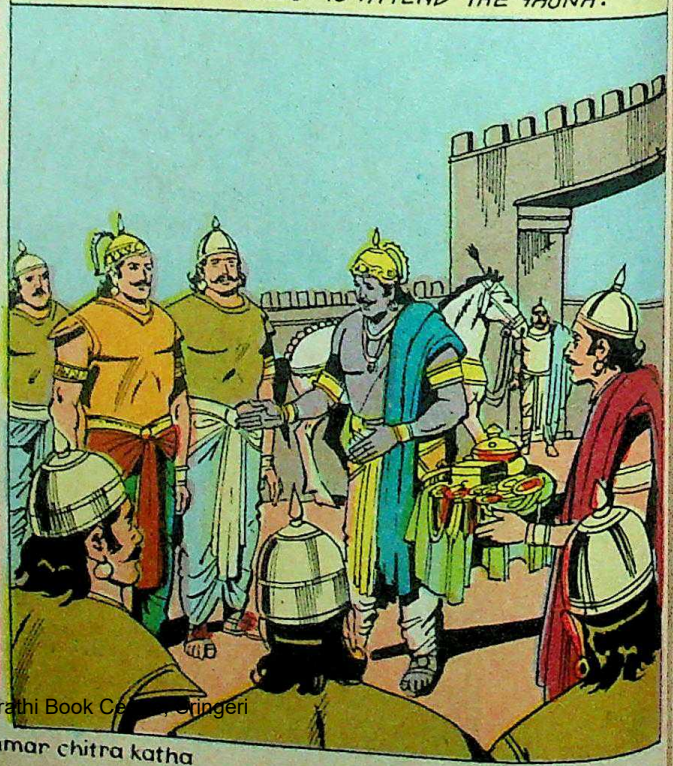
"ARJUNA ACCOMPANIED THE HORSE, HAPPILY TWANGING HIS GANDEEVA, FOLLOWED BY SEVERAL PRIESTS AND SOLDIERS.



"MEANWHILE YUDHISHTHIRA SAT BEFORE THE SACRIFICIAL FIRE, LOOKING RESPLENDENT IN SILK GARMENTS AND GOLD ORNAMENTS, IN PREPARATION FOR THE INITIATION RITES OF THE YAJNA.

"ARJUNA FOLLOWED THE HORSE WHEREVER IT WENT. FIRST TO THE NORTH, THEN TO THE EAST. SEVERAL KINGS SOUGHT TO OBSTRUCT THE HORSE, BUT ARJUNA PROVED MORE THAN A MATCH FOR THEM. ONE BY ONE, THEY CONSENTED TO THE SUZERAINTY OF THE PANDAVAS AND AGREED TO ATTEND THE YAJNA.



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"AFTER ACCOMPLISHING HIS TASK, ARJUNA MADE HIS WAY BACK TO HASTINAPURA. WHEN YUDHISHTHIRA HEARD OF THIS, HIS JOY KNEW NO BOUNDS.

BHEEMA, NAKULA! HAVE YOU HEARD? ARJUNA IS ON HIS WAY BACK.

THERE IS BARELY A MONTH LEFT FOR THE PREPARATIONS. BHEEMA, SELECT A SUITABLE PLACE FOR THE SITE.

"ELATED BY THE TIDINGS OF ARJUNA'S RETURN, BHEEMA WENT ABOUT FULFILLING HIS DUTIES WITH ENTHUSIASM.

"BEAUTIFUL PALACES, FITTED WITH GOLDEN PILLARS AND IMPOSING GATEWAYS, WERE SOON ERECTED. ONE BY ONE, THE INVITED GUESTS ASSEMBLED THERE.

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"JUST THEN THE SACRIFICIAL HORSE GALLOPED INTO SIGHT FOLLOWED BY THE WEARY BUT VICTORIOUS ARJUNA.

"PEOPLE SHOWERED PRAISES ON HIM AS HE PROCEEDED TOWARDS THE YAJNA-ALTAR.

WHO BUT ARJUNA COULD RETURN VICTORIOUS LIKE THIS ?

WE ARE FORTUNATE INDEED THAT HE HAS RETURNED SAFE.

"DHRITARASHTRA AND YUDHISHTHIRA HASTENED TO WELCOME HIM.

"WITH DUE CEREMONY, THE HORSE WAS SACRIFICED.

"YUDHISHTHIRA THEN OFFERED THE WHOLE EARTH AS A GIFT TO VYASA, WHO SAID—

I RETURN THIS GIFT TO YOU. WE BRAHMANAS PREFER A GIFT OF MONEY, NOT LAND.

"YUDHISHTHIRA WAS INSISTENT—

I CANNOT TAKE ANYTHING FROM BRAHMANAS. MY BROTHERS TOO WILL AGREE.

WE DO.

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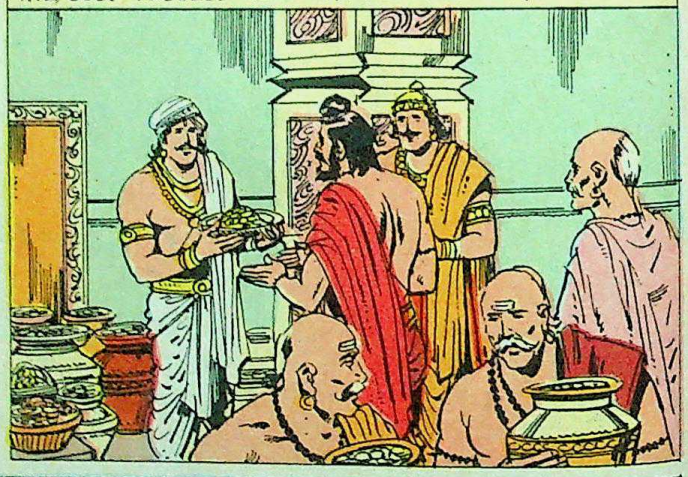
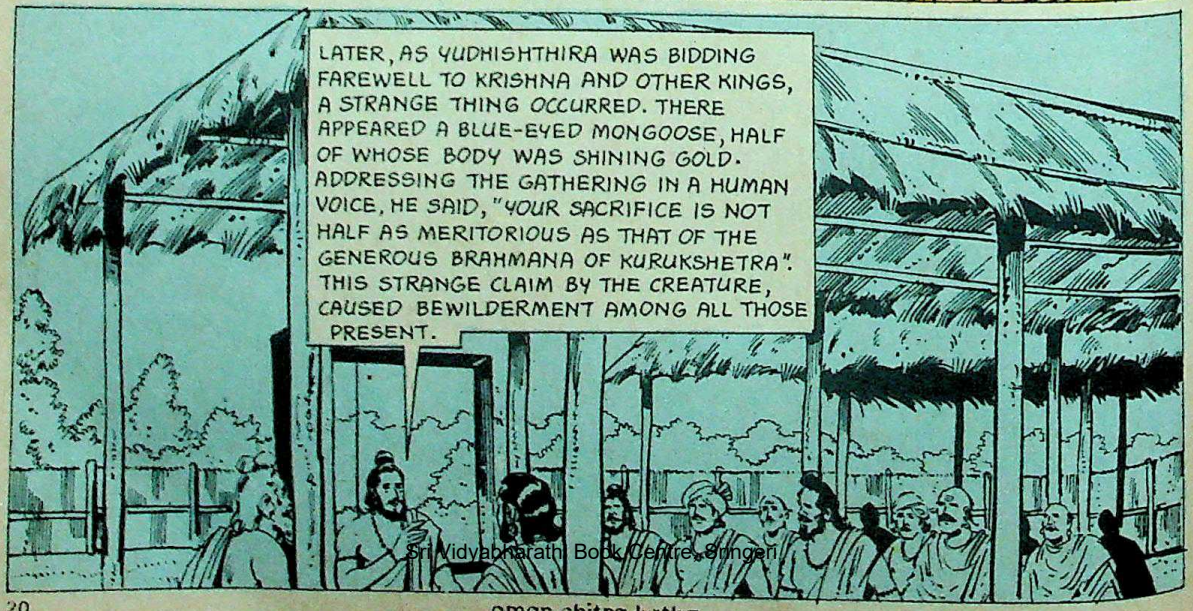
"THE PERFORMANCE OF THE ASHWAMEDHA REQUIRED THE GIFTING AWAY OF ALL THE LAND ACQUIRED DURING THE CONQUEST. BUT SELDOM WAS THIS ACTUALLY DONE. INSTEAD, GENEROUS GIFTS OF GOLD WERE MADE TO THE BRAHMANAS. SO VYASA PERSUADED YUDHISHTHIRA —

"KRISHNA SAID TO YUDHISHTHIRA —

"KING YUDHISHTHIRA GIFTED TO THE ATTENDENT BRAHMANAS MILLIONS OF GOLD COINS AS WELL AS ALL THE GOLD VESSELS USED FOR THE CEREMONY.





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"THE PRIESTS SURROUNDED THE MONGOOSE AND ASKED HIM —

WHERE HAVE YOU COME FROM? WHO ARE YOU TO FIND FAULT WITH OUR SACRIFICE? WE HAVE DONE EVERYTHING ACCORDING TO THE SHASTRAS. WHAT MAKES YOU SCORN US?

THE MONGOOSE LAUGHED AND SAID —

I DO NOT SPEAK OUT OF FALSEHOOD OR PRIDE, O BRAHMANAS. I REPEAT, YOUR SACRIFICE IS NOT EQUAL TO THE SEER OF PORRIDGE GIFTED BY THE POOR BRAHMANA OF KURUKSHETRA.

I WITNESSED THIS NOBLE ACT MYSELF AND, AS A RESULT OF HIS MERIT, HALF MY BODY HAS BECOME GOLD. LISTEN TO ME, O BRAHMANAS, WHILE I NARRATE THAT INCIDENT TO YOU.

LONG AGO, IN KURUKSHETRA, THERE LIVED A BRAHMANA WHO OBTAINED FOOD BY GLEANING GRAIN FROM NEARBY FIELDS. HIS FAMILY, CONSISTING OF HIS WIFE, SON AND DAUGHTER-IN-LAW, ATE ONLY ONCE IN THREE DAYS...

...AND SOMETIMES EVEN LESS FREQUENTLY. ONCE THERE WAS A TERRIBLE DROUGHT. THE LAND WAS PARCHED, THE FIELDS LAY BARE. THE FAMILY STARVED FOR DAYS ON END.

ONE DAY, AFTER WANDERING ABOUT FOR HOURS IN THE HEAT AND DUST, THEY MANAGED TO COLLECT A SEER OF GRAIN.

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"THEY MADE PORRIDGE OUT OF IT, AND DIVIDED IT INTO FOUR EQUAL PORTIONS. JUST THEN A GUEST ARRIVED.

"THEY WELCOMED THE UNEXPECTED GUEST AND INVITED HIM TO SHARE THEIR MEAL. THE BRAHMANA FIRST OFFERED HIS OWN SHARE. BUT IT WAS NOT ENOUGH TO SATISFY THE NEWCOMER.

"THE BRAHMANA FELT HELPLESS AND DID NOT KNOW WHAT TO DO. HIS WIFE CALLED HIM ASIDE.

PLEASE GIVE HIM MY SHARE TOO. IF YOU CAN GO HUNGRY, WHY, SO CAN I.

I DON'T LIKE TO DO SO, BUT IF YOU INSIST...

"RELUCTANTLY, THE HOST GAVE HIS WIFE'S PORTION TO THE GUEST WHO STILL DID NOT LOOK SATIATED. THE SON SAID—

FATHER, TAKE MY SHARE FOR OUR REVERED GUEST.

OH! I KNOW WHAT HUNGER IS TO A GROWING YOUNG BOY LIKE YOU, YET...

"SAYING SO, THE BRAHMANA OFFERED THE THIRD PORTION TO THE GUEST. BUT STILL HIS HUNGER SEEMED UNAPPEASED. THE DAUGHTER-IN-LAW SAID SOFTLY —

DEAR FATHER, PLEASE ACCEPT MY SHARE TOO.

FROM YOU I CANNOT. YOU ARE YET A CHILD. MOREOVER YOU ARE HUNGRY, AND FRAIL BECAUSE OF THE CONTINUOUS STARVATION.

"BUT SHE PERSUADED HIM TO OFFER THE LAST PORTION TOO TO THE GUEST. SATISFIED AT LAST, HE SAID —

YOUR GENEROSITY IS ADMIRABLE. EVEN THE DEVAS IN HEAVEN ARE PLEASED WITH YOU. BEHOLD HOW THEY SHOWER YOU WITH FLOWERS! YOU HAVE EARNED A PLACE IN HEAVEN WITH YOUR PURE AND SELFLESS ACTION.

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"AFTER THE ASHWAMEDHA YAJNA WAS OVER, YUDHISHTHIRA RETURNED TO HIS ROYAL DUTIES.

"BUT EVEN AFTER HE WAS FORMALLY CROWNED HE SOUGHT DHRITARASHTRA'S ADVICE ON EVERY IMPORTANT MATTER.

"KRIPACHARYA AND VIDURA WERE DHRITARASHTRA'S CONSTANT COMPANIONS. SAGE VYASA TOO VISITED HIM REGULARLY AND REGALED HIM WITH STORIES.

"ONE DAY, YUDHISHTHIRA SAID TO HIS BROTHERS —

WE MUST DO OUR BEST TO MAKE HIM FORGET THE LOSS OF HIS SONS. LET NO EFFORT BE SPARED TO MAKE DHRITA-RASHTRA AND GANDHARI COMFORTABLE AND CONTENTED.

"ARJUNA, NAKULA AND SAHADEVA READILY COMPLIED. BUT NOT BHEEMA.

WHATEVER HAPPENED WAS THE RESULT OF DHRITARASHTRA'S EVIL MIND. I CAN NEVER FORGIVE HIM. NEVER!

"ALTHOUGH IN DEFERENCE TO YUDHISHTHIRA'S WISHES, HE WAS OUTWARDLY POLITE TO THE OLD COUPLE, HIS HEART WAS FILLED WITH BITTERNESS. ONE DAY, WHEN THEY WERE WITHIN HEARING, HE BOASTED TO HIS FRIENDS.

SEE THESE STRONG ARMS OF MINE.

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"DISPLAYING HIS STRONG BICEPS, HE SAID —

WITH THESE VERY ARMS I CRUSHED TO DEATH ALL THE SONS OF THAT BLIND KING, DHRITARASHTRA.

BHEEMA GAVE A VIVID DESCRIPTION OF HOW HE HAD KILLED THE KAURAVAS, KNOWING VERY WELL HOW MUCH PAIN IT WOULD CAUSE TO THE OLD KING.

"FOR FIFTEEN YEARS, DHRITARASHTRA AND GANDHARI HAD LIVED AMICABLY WITH THE PANDAVAS, BUT BHEEMA'S CRUEL WORDS OPENED UP OLD WOUNDS. DHRITARASHTRA CALLED HIS FRIENDS TOGETHER.

YOU ALL KNOW WELL ENOUGH HOW THE KAURAVA CLAN WAS DESTROYED BECAUSE I IGNORED THE ADVICE OF MY WELL-WISHERS.

NOW, AFTER FIFTEEN YEARS, I HAVE BEGUN TO REALISE THE MANY SINS I COMMITTED. TO ABSOLVE MYSELF, I HAVE DECIDED TO FAST AND DO PENANCE.

"THEN ONE DAY, DHRITARASHTRA TOLD YUDHISHTHIRA —

GANDHARI AND I WOULD LIKE TO RETIRE TO THE FOREST AND SPEND THE REST OF OUR DAYS IN PRAYER AND PENANCE.

A KING IS LIKE A VENERABLE TEACHER FOR ALL HIS SUBJECTS. SO, WE REQUEST YOU TO GRANT US PERMISSION TO LEAVE.

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"YUDHISHTHIRA WAS VISIBLY UPSET.

OH! WHAT A FOOL I HAVE BEEN NOT TO REALISE HOW UNHAPPY YOU ARE. HERE YOU ARE STARVING YOURSELF AND LIVING LIKE AN ASCETIC AND WE DID NOT EVEN KNOW ABOUT IT.

"DHRITARASHTRA TRIED TO EXPLAIN.

IT IS PROPER FOR US IN OUR OLD AGE TO LIVE IN THE FOREST. ALL OUR FOREFATHERS FOLLOWED THIS PRACTICE.

OH! BUT I CANNOT LET YOU GO. IF YOU INSIST ON GOING I SWEAR I TOO WILL FOLLOW YOU.

"FOR LONG DHRITARASHTRA TRIED TO PERSUADE YUDHISHTHIRA, WHO IN TURN PLEADED WITH HIM TO STAY ON. DHRITARASHTRA SAID—

SANJAYA! KRIPA! WILL ONE OF YOU EXPLAIN TO YUDHISHTHIRA THAT I AM WEARY AND NOW MY MOUTH IS DRY. I CANNOT TALK ANY LONGER.

"WITH THESE WORDS, DHRITARASHTRA, ALMOST FAINT WITH FATIGUE, TURNED TO GANDHARI FOR SUPPORT.

"YUDHISHTHIRA COULD NOT BEAR TO SEE HIM IN SUCH A STATE. HE TENDERLY WIPED THE OLD KING'S FACE WITH HIS HAND AFTER FIRST DIPPING IT IN COLD WATER.

OH! YOU, WHO COULD ONCE CRUSH THE IRON IMAGE OF BHEEMA, ARE NOW SO WEAK. IT IS ALL MY FAULT.

"DHRITARASHTRA EXPLAINED—

IT IS FOUR DAYS SINCE I LAST ATE. THAT IS WHY I AM SO WEAK. BUT YOUR SOOTHING TOUCH HAS REFRESHED ME. YOU MUST NOW ALLOW ME TO LEAVE.

I WILL DO WHAT IS DEAR TO YOU. BUT I REFUSE TO DISCUSS ANYTHING TILL I SEE YOU FED PROPERLY.

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I WILL EAT ONLY AFTER I RECEIVE YOUR PERMISSION TO LEAVE FOR THE FOREST.

JUST THEN, SAGE VYASA ARRIVED. HE SAID —

DO AS DHRITARASHTRA SAYS. ALLOW HIM TO RETIRE TO THE FOREST.

IF YOU SAY SO, I AGREE.

"AFTER ALL OF THEM HAD EATEN, DHRITARASHTRA AFFECTIONATELY GAVE YUDHISHTHIRA SOME PARTING ADVICE.

ALWAYS KEEP THE COMPANY OF WISE MEN AND TAKE THEIR OPINION ON IMPORTANT ISSUES.

"LATER GANDHARI ASKED DHRITARASHTRA —

NOW THAT SAGE VYASA HAS GIVEN YOU PERMISSION AND YUDHISHTHIRA TOO HAS AGREED, WHEN WILL WE LEAVE FOR THE FOREST?

SOON, VERY SOON. BUT BEFORE THAT I WOULD LIKE TO SPEAK TO THE PEOPLE.

"ARRANGEMENTS WERE MADE TO INVITE CITIZENS FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE TO MEET DHRITARASHTRA. ADDRESSING THEM, HE SAID —

GANDHARI AND I HAVE DECIDED TO RETIRE TO THE FOREST. WE HAVE BEEN GRANTED LEAVE TO DO SO BY SAGE VYASA AND KING YUDHISHTHIRA.

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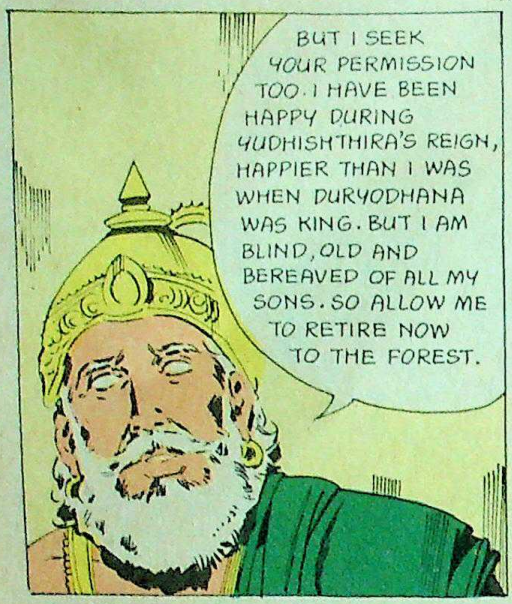

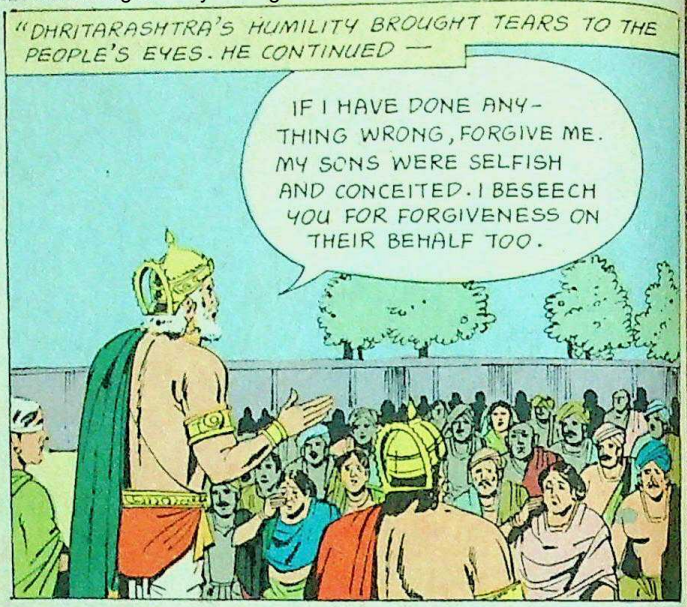

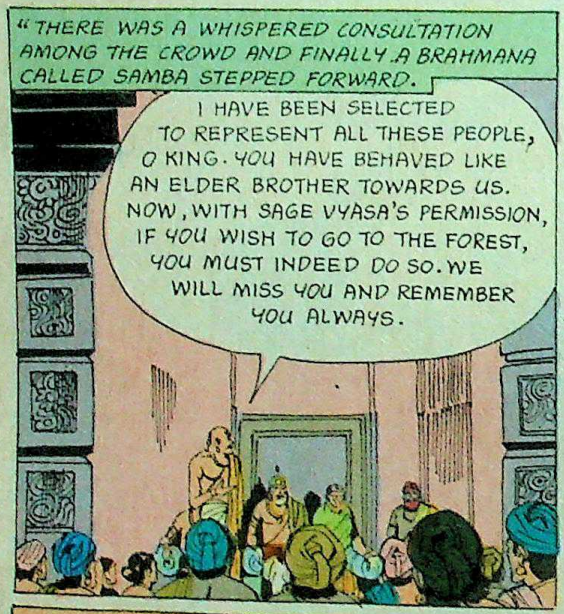

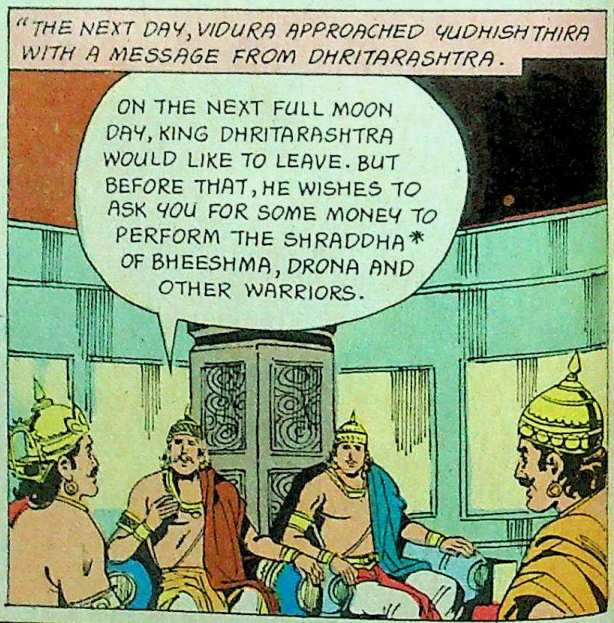

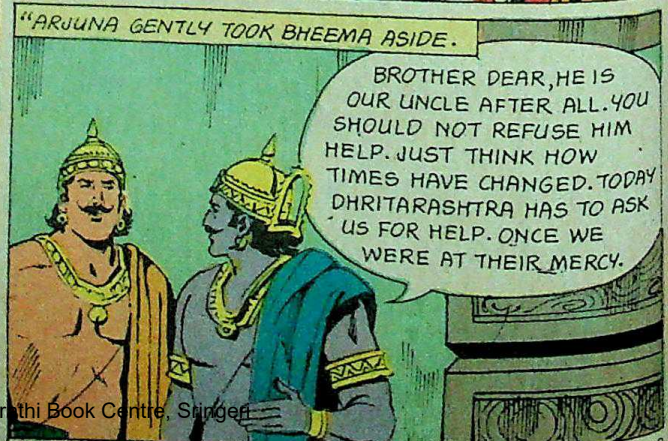

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* RITES PERFORMED TO PLEASE THE DEAD ONES

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BHEEMA'S ANGER COULD NOT BE CONTAINED.

WE OURSELVES WILL PERFORM THE REQUIRED CEREMONIES. LEAVE THE OLD KING OUT OF IT.

YUDHISHTHIRA COULD NOT RECALL THE ATROCITIES HEAPED ON THEM BY THE KAURAVAS. YUDHISHTHIRA BECAME UNHAPPY.

KEEP QUIET, BHEEMA. THAT IS ENOUGH.

"THEN HE TURNED TO VIDURA AND SAID —

UNCLE, PLEASE TELL KING DHRITARASHTRA THAT HE CAN TAKE ANY AMOUNT OF MONEY AND MATERIALS FROM ME.

"VIDURA CONVEYED THIS NEWS TO DHRITARASHTRA WHO ARRANGED A TEN-DAY-LONG CEREMONY FOR THE SALVATION OF THE SOULS OF FALLEN WARRIORS.

"ON THE ELEVENTH DAY HE CALLED FOR THE PANDAVAS AND PREPARED TO LEAVE FOR THE FOREST.

"WHEN YUDHISHTHIRA SAW DHRITARASHTRA CLAD IN DEERSKIN, THE FINALITY OF THE DECISION STRUCK HIM.

OH! DO NOT LEAVE ME. DO NOT GO AWAY.

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"ARJUNA COULD UNDERSTAND YUDHISHTHIRA'S EMOTIONAL STATE.

COME, BROTHER DEAR, DON'T BE SO RESTLESS.

"WHEN GANDHARI AND DHRITARASHTRA EMERGED FROM THE PALACE, YUDHISHTHIRA WAS SURPRISED TO SEE KUNTI LEADING THE WAY.

MOTHER, YOU ENCOURAGED US TO FIGHT AND WIN THIS THRONE. HOW CAN YOU LEAVE US NOW?

SON, WHATEVER I DID SO FAR WAS FOR YOUR SAFETY AND WELFARE. BUT NOW I MUST RETIRE TO THE FOREST.

"AS KUNTI, GANDHARI AND DHRITARASHTRA SLOWLY WALKED AWAY FROM THE PALACE, THEY WERE FOLLOWED BY A WEEPING AND SOBBING CROWD OF PEOPLE.

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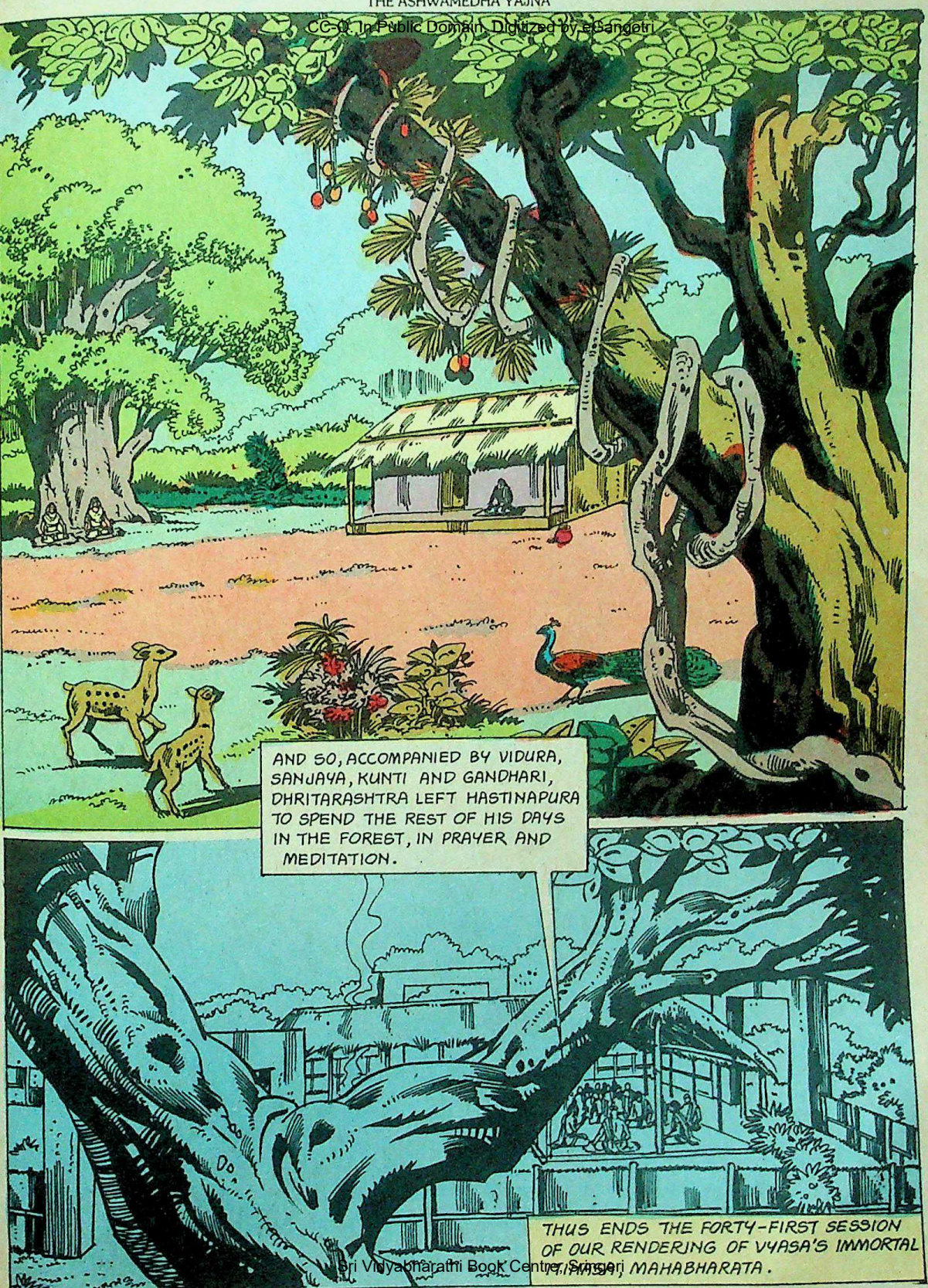

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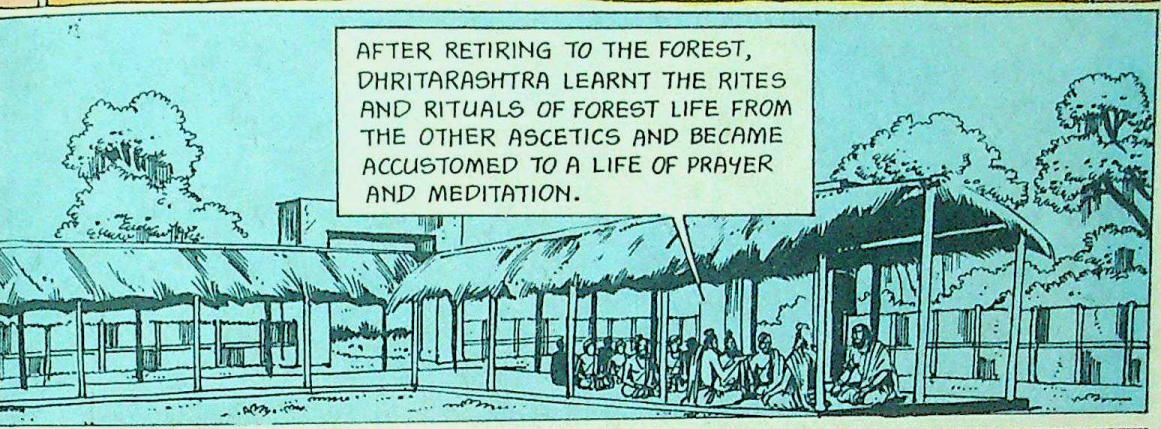
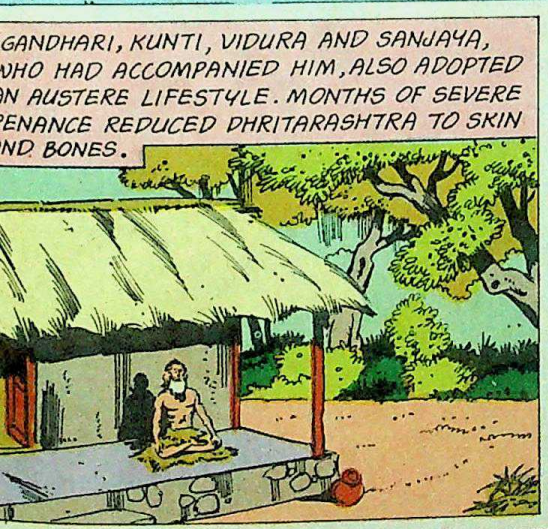
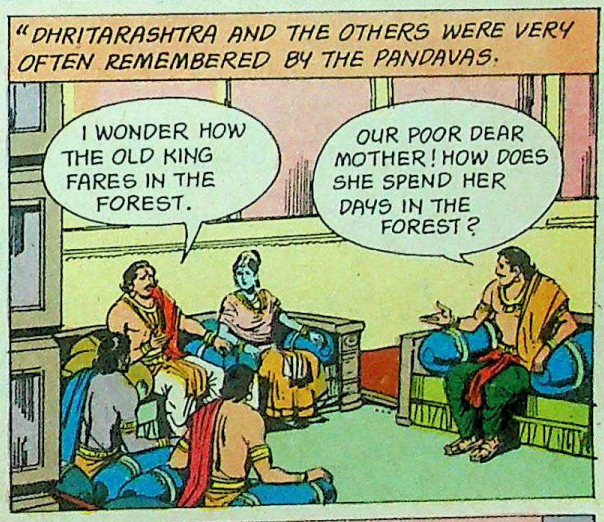
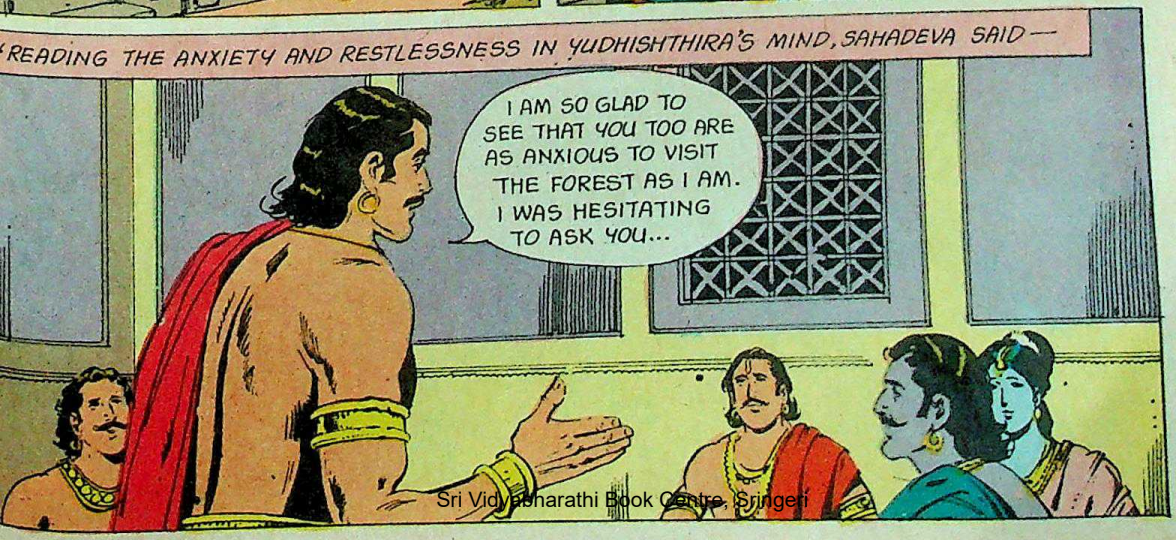
Mahabharata – 42

THE CELESTIAL REUNION









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"DRAUPADI SAID —

I TOO LONG TO SEE OUR DEAR MOTHER KUNTI. IN FACT, ALL THE LADIES OF THE INNER PALACE ARE WAITING FOR THE DAY THEY CAN MEET GANDHARI AND KUNTI.

"YUDHISHTHIRA SENT FOR HIS ARMY CHIEF.

PREPARE YOUR MEN. WE WILL LEAVE FOR THE FOREST TOMORROW. WE WISH TO VISIT KING DHRITARASHTRA. LET AN ANNOUNCEMENT BE MADE THAT ALL CITIZENS OF HASTINAPURA ARE WELCOME TO JOIN US.

"AT DAWN, A LONG CARAVAN OF CHARIOTS AND HORSES, ELEPHANTS AND CAMELS WAS SEEN WINDING ITS WAY OUT OF HASTINAPURA. BEHIND IT WERE MULES LADEN WITH GOODS.

"YUYUTSU AND THE ROYAL PRIEST DHAUMYA WERE LEFT IN CHARGE OF THE KINGDOM.

"LEAVING THEIR HORSES AND CHARIOTS AT A DISTANCE, THE PANDAVAS WALKED UP TO DHRITARASHTRA'S HERMITAGE.

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YUDHISHTHIRA ENQUIRED OF THE SAGES HERE—

WHERE IS OUR DEAR UNCLE DHRITARASHTRA?

YOU WILL FIND HIM ON THE BANKS OF THE YAMUNA, BATHING AND GATHERING FLOWERS.

"WHILE THE OTHERS WALKED LEISURELY TOWARDS THE RIVER BANK, SAHADEVA RAN AHEAD TO GREET KUNTI.

"HE FELL AT HER FEET AND SOBBED LOUDLY.

"AFTER GREETING THE ELDERS WITH DUE RESPECT, THE PANDAVAS HELPED THEM TO CARRY THE WATER POTS BACK TO THE HERMITAGE.

"DHRITARASHTRA SAID—

AH! HAVING ALL OF YOU AROUND ME MAKES ME FEEL I AM BACK IN THE PALACE.

"AT THE HERMITAGE, A CURIOUS CROWD HAD ALREADY GATHERED. SANJAYA INTRODUCED THE PANDAVAS TO THEM.

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BUT I DON'T SEE THE VENERABLE VIDURA WITH YOU. WHERE IS HE?

HE IS DOING SEVERE PENANCE. HE IS REDUCED TO SKIN AND BONES.

"JUST THEN THEY SAW VIDURA COMING TOWARDS THE ASHRAM.

WHY THERE HE IS! BUT HE IS TURNING AWAY. I MUST SPEAK TO HIM.

"YUDHISHTHIRA RAN AFTER VIDURA.

STOP! STOP! I AM YOUR YUDHISHTHIRA! I HAVE COME TO MEET YOU.

"VIDURA PAUSED IN THE THICK OF THE FOREST, AND STOOD AGAINST A TREE, STARING INTENTLY AT YUDHISHTHIRA.

"IN A MOMENT YUDHISHTHIRA REALISED THAT HE WAS STARING AT VIDURA'S LIFELESS BODY.

"BUT WHEN IT CAME TO PERFORMING THE CREMATION OF THE BODY OF VIDURA, THERE WAS A HEAVENLY VOICE—

VIDURA WAS LIVING THE LIFE OF A SANYASI. THEREFORE DO NOT CREMATE HIM.*

* SANYASIS ARE BURIED, NOT CREMATED

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"THE DEATH OF VIDURA TOOK EVERYONE BY SURPRISE. YUDHISHTHIRA AND HIS RETINUE SPENT THE NIGHT UNDER THE TREES.

FOR A MONTH, YUDHISHTHIRA AND THE OTHERS STAYED IN THE FOREST VISITING VARIOUS ASHRAMAS AND BESTOWING GENEROUS GIFTS ON THE SAGES. THEN WITH THE PERMISSION AND BLESSINGS OF DHRITARASHTRA AND GANDHARI, THEY MADE THEIR WAY BACK TO HASTINAPURA.

"TWO YEARS AFTER THEIR VISIT TO THE FOREST, SAGE NARADA VISITED YUDHISHTHIRA. ANXIOUSLY YUDHISHTHIRA ASKED HIM —

DID YOU SEE THE VENERABLE DHRITARASHTRA? I HAVE HEARD THAT HE IS OBSERVING SEVERE PENANCE.

LISTEN CALMLY. I WILL GIVE YOU ALL THE NEWS.

AFTER YOU RETURNED TO HASTINAPURA, DHRITARASHTRA, GANDHARI, KUNTI AND SANJAYA ALL LEFT FOR HARIDWAR*.

"YOUR UNCLE DHRITARASHTRA REDUCED HIMSELF TO A MERE SKELETON THROUGH STARVATION AND SEVERE PENANCE.

"GANDHARI, KUNTI AND SANJAYA ALSO SPENT THEIR DAYS IN FASTING AND PRAYER.

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* A PLACE OF PILGRIMAGE IN THE HIMALAYAN FOOT HILLS, (NOW IN U.P.)

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"ONE DAY WHEN DHRITARASHTRA WAS RETURNING TO HIS ASHRAMA AFTER HIS BATH, A STORM BROKE, AND WITH IT A FOREST FIRE. SOON, THE WHOLE FOREST WAS AFLAME.

"SO WEAK AND HELPLESS HAD THEY BECOME THAT DHRITARASHTRA, KUNTI AND GANDHARI COULD NOT RUN AWAY.

TAKE TO YOUR HEELS, SANJAYA. WE WILL MEET OUR ENDS IN THIS FIRE.

"PERSUADING SANJAYA TO ESCAPE, THE THREE OF THEM SAT DOWN.

SO WHILE THE THREE OF THEM WERE CONSUMED BY THE FOREST FIRE, SANJAYA WENT TO THE HIGHER HIMALAYAS.

"THE NEWS CAME AS A REAL SHOCK TO YUDHISHTHIRA AND HIS BROTHERS. THEY WERE REDUCED TO TEARS AND TRIED TO COMFORT ONE ANOTHER.

Sri Vidyabharathi Book Centre, Sringeri

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"YUDHISHTHIRA RETURNED TO HIS ROYAL DUTIES, BUT HIS HEART WAS NOT AT REST, FILLED AS IT WAS WITH SORROW. THE YEARS ROLLED BY UNEVENTFULLY. THIRTY-SIX YEARS AFTER THE GREAT WAR, ILL OMENS STARTED TO APPEAR.

"STORMS LASHED THE COUNTRYSIDE, METEORS STREAKED THROUGH THE SKY, THE SUN AND THE MOON TOO APPEARED TO BE SURROUNDED BY STRANGE RINGS.

"BUT WHEN THE NEWS OF THE DESTRUCTION OF THE VRISHNI CLAN REACHED THE PANDAVAS, THEIR GRIEF KNEW NO BOUNDS.

BUT HOW DID THAT HAPPEN? HOW COULD THE ENTIRE CLAN OF THE VRISHNIS BE SUDDENLY DESTROYED? WAS IT A RESULT OF SOME CURSE?

YES, IT HAPPENED MANY YEARS AGO WHEN SAGE VISHWAMITRA, KANVA AND NARADA HAD GONE TO DWARAKA FOR A VISIT.

"SOME MISCHIEVOUS YADAVA BOYS DRESSED UP SAMBA* AS A WOMAN AND TOOK HIM TO THE SAGES.

THIS IS BABHRU'S WIFE, AND SHE IS HOPING FOR A SON. YOU RISHIS ARE WISE MEN. TELL US WHETHER SHE WILL HAVE A BOY OR A GIRL.

WHAT DO THESE YOUNGSTERS THINK! HOW DARE THEY FOOL US THUS?

Sri Vidyabharathi Book Centre, Shirali

* A SON OF KRISHNA

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"WITH RED-SHOT EYES, THE SAGES DECLARED —

YOU CRUEL, WICKED BOYS! THIS SON OF KRISHNA WILL GIVE BIRTH TO AN IRON PESTLE* WHICH WILL CAUSE THE DESTRUCTION OF ALL THE VRISHNI AND ANDHAKA RACES. ONLY BALARAMA AND KRISHNA WILL BE SPARED. BALARAMA WILL CONSIGN HIMSELF TO THE SEA, AND KRISHNA WILL BE KILLED BY A HUNTER WHILE HE IS LYING DOWN.

"SURELY ENOUGH THE NEXT MORNING, SAMBA GAVE BIRTH TO AN IRON PESTLE. HIS COMPANIONS RUSHED UP TO KING UGRASENA AND GAVE THE PESTLE TO HIM.

"AFRAID OF ITS ALLEGED POWER OF DESTRUCTION, THE KING ORDERED THE IRON PESTLE TO BE CRUSHED INTO POWDER, AND TO BE CAST INTO THE SEA. WITH A VIEW TO PREVENT DRUNKEN BRAWLS A PUBLIC PROCLAMATION WAS MADE THAT LIQUOR SHOULD NOT THEREAFTER BE PREPARED OR CONSUMED IN THE KINGDOM.

"IN COURSE OF TIME, THE DENIZENS OF DWARAKA FORGOT ABOUT THIS INCIDENT. BUT WHEN THIRTY-SIX YEARS AFTER THE GREAT WAR, ILL OMENS BEGAN TO APPEAR IN DWARAKA TOO, KRISHNA REALISED THE SIGNIFICANCE. GATHERING HIS PEOPLE TOGETHER, HE SAID —

I PERCEIVE ILL OMENS IDENTICAL TO THOSE WE PERCEIVED BEFORE THE GREAT WAR.

* TOOL USED FOR POUNDING IN A MORTAR.

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"THEN HE PONDERED FOR A WHILE.

WHY! IT IS THIRTY-SIX YEARS SINCE THAT GREAT BATTLE. IT IS NOW TIME FOR GANDHARI'S CURSE TO TAKE EFFECT.

I FEEL IT IS BEST FOR ALL OF US TO GO ON A PILGRIMAGE. LET ALL OF US GATHER TOGETHER AT PRABHASA*.

"THE HEADS OF THE FAMILIES OF VRISHNIS AND ANDHAKAS WERE WILLING TO ABIDE BY HIS DECISION. HECTIC PREPARATIONS WERE SOON UNDER WAY.

"MOUNTED ON HORSES, ELEPHANTS AND CHARIOTS, THE ARMY TOO PREPARED TO LEAVE THE TOWN.

"ON REACHING PRABHASA, THEY SET UP CAMP AND SETTLED DOWN. THEN BEGAN THE FEASTING AND DRINKING IN WHICH KRISHNA, BALARAMA, SATYAKI AND KRITAVARMA ALSO JOINED.

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* A PLACE OF PILGRIMAGE NEAR DWARAKA

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"SATYAKI, QUITE DRUNK, TOOK IT TO HIS HEAD TO INSULT KRITAVARMA.

I HAVE YET TO SEE ANOTHER KSHATRIYA WHO WOULD KILL HIS HAPLESS ENEMIES WHILE THEY ARE ASLEEP. WHAT YOU DID WAS UNFORGIVABLE.

"WILD WITH FURY, KRITAVARMA RETORTED—

DIDN'T YOU KILL BHOORISHRAVA AFTER HE HAD LAID DOWN HIS WEAPONS? DO YOU THINK YOU WERE VERY BRAVE THEN?

"THE OTHERS BEGAN TAKING SIDES AND A DRUNKEN BRAWL WAS SOON ON.

"SATYAKI SPRANG UP WITH A LIVID FACE.

TODAY I SWEAR I WILL AVENGE THE DEATH OF DHRISHTADYUMNA AND THE OTHERS. I WILL KILL THIS WICKED KRITAVARMA WHO SLAYED THEM WITH THE HELP OF ASHWATTHAMA.

"SWIFTLY SATYAKI TOOK THE SWORD FROM KRISHNA AND IN AN INSTANT, CUT OFF KRITAVARMA'S HEAD.

"THEN, CRAZY WITH ANGER AND DRINK, HE BEGAN ATTACKING EVERYONE AROUND.

Shri Mahabharat Book Centre

"KRISHNA HASTENED TO CONTROL HIM, BUT JUST THEN THE ANDHAKAS SURROUNDED SATYAKI. IN THEIR DRUNKEN STATE, THEY ATTACKED HIM WITH THE POTS AND PANS THAT WERE LYING AROUND.

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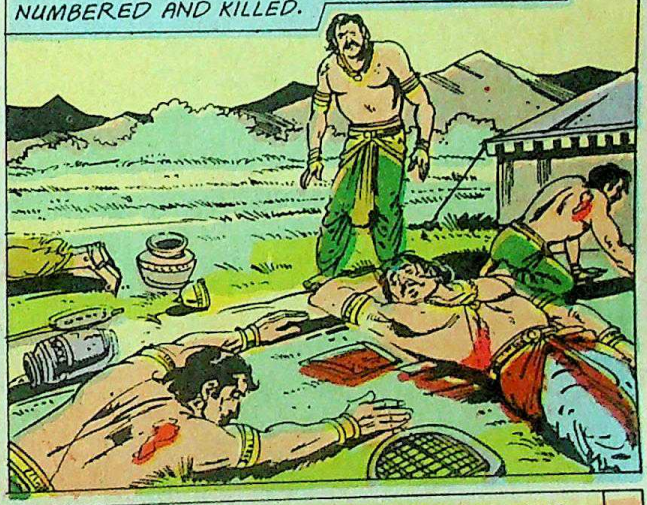
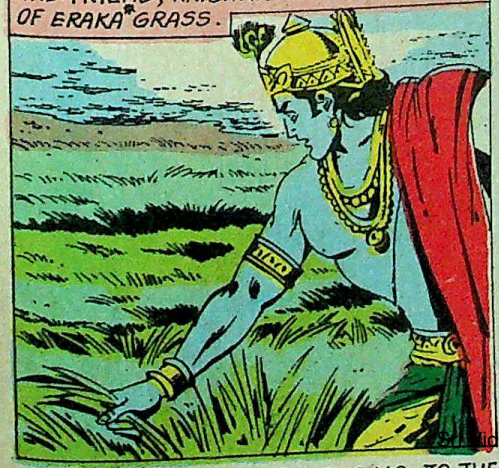
"TO PROTECT SATYAKI, KRISHNA'S SON PRADYUMNA JUMPED INTO THE FRAY.

"THOUGH THEY WERE BOTH STRONG AND VALOROUS, SATYAKI AND PRADYUMNA WERE SOON OUT-NUMBERED AND KILLED.



"ENRAGED BY THE KILLING OF HIS SON AND FRIEND, KRISHNA PLUCKED A CLUMP OF ERAKA* GRASS.



"NO SOONER HAD THE GRASS TOUCHED HIS HAND, THAN IT TURNED INTO A FORMIDABLE IRON PESTLE.

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* A TYPE OF GRASS BELONGING TO THE RUSH FAMILY

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"HOLDING THE IRON WEAPON ALOFT, KRISHNA ATTACKED ALL THOSE WHO CONFRONTED HIM.

"THEREAFTER, WHOSOEVER PULLED UP A TUFT OF THAT GRASS, FOUND HIMSELF ARMED WITH A TERRIBLE WEAPON.

"DRIVEN BY DESTINY, THE VRISHNI CLAN ATTACKED ONE ANOTHER.

"WHILE THE FIGHT REACHED ITS CLIMAX, KRISHNA STOOD BY, WATCHING SILENTLY AS FATHER KILLED SON, AND BROTHER ATTACKED BROTHER WITH IRON RODS.

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"SOON, HOWEVER, KRISHNA'S SONS SAMBA, CHARUDESHNA AND HIS GRANDSON ANIRUDDHA WERE ALSO KILLED. ONLY DARUKA, KRISHNA'S CHARIOTEER, AND BABHRU, THE MINISTER OF THE YADAVAS, REMAINED ALIVE.

DARUKA SAID —

ALL ARE DEAD NOW, O LORD, BUT BALARAMA IS NOT TO BE SEEN. COME, LET US GO AND LOOK FOR HIM.

"THEY SOON FOUND HIM NEAR THE SEA SHORE.

"KRISHNA SAID —

DARUKA, GO AT ONCE TO HASTINAPURA AND TELL ARJUNA ABOUT THIS TERRIBLE CARNAGE. ASK HIM TO RUSH TO DWARAKA.

"DARUKA AT ONCE ASCENDED HIS CHARIOT AND LEFT. TURNING TO BABHRU, KRISHNA SAID —

GO TO DWARAKA TO PROTECT OUR WOMENFOLK.

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"BEFORE HE COULD EVEN STIR, BABHRU WAS FELLED BY AN IRON ROD WHICH HAD GOT STUCK TO A HUNTER'S ARROW.

"KRISHNA SAID TO BALARAMA —

PLEASE WAIT HERE FOR ME WHILE I LEAVE THE WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN SAFE AND CAPABLE HANDS.

"KRISHNA RETURNED TO DWARAKA AND TO HIS FATHER VASUDEVA.

I HAVE CALLED FOR ARJUNA. PLEASE LOOK AFTER THE WOMEN OF OUR CLAN TILL HE ARRIVES. I MUST GO BACK TO BALA-RAMA. HE IS WAITING FOR ME AS WE BOTH INTEND TO DO TAPASYA* NOW. I CANNOT BEAR TO LIVE HERE ANY MORE.

"AS KRISHNA WAS ABOUT TO RUSH BACK, HE HEARD A LOUD WAILING AND CRYING.

"HE FOUND THE WOMEN AND CHILDREN HUDDLED TOGETHER, WEEPING HELPLESSLY. CONSOLING THEM, HE SAID —

CALM YOURSELF. ARJUNA WILL SOON BE HERE. HE WILL PROTECT YOU.

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* MEDITATION AND AUSTERITIES

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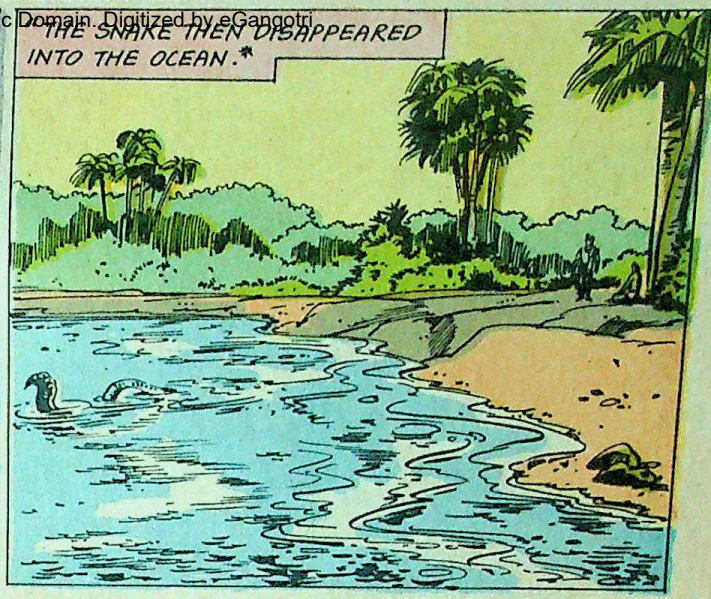

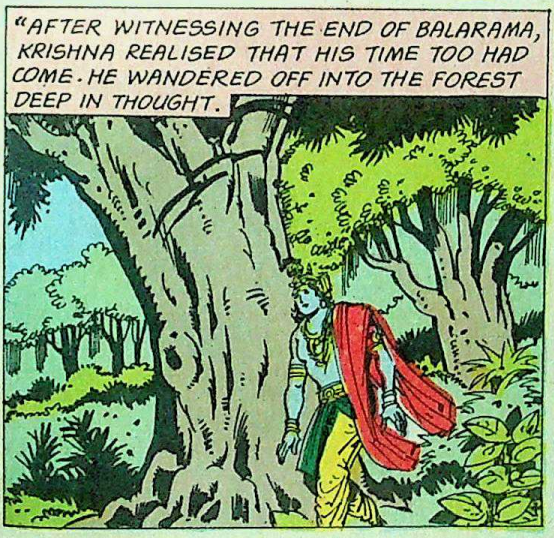

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* AS KRISHNA WAS THE INCARNATION OF VISHNU, BALARAMA WAS BELIEVED TO BE THE INCARNATION OF SHESHA, THE SERPENT ON WHICH VISHNU RECLINES

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"CAMOUFLAGED BY THE FOLIAGE, HE MISTOOK THE SUPINE KRISHNA FOR A DEER, AND SHOT AN ARROW IN THAT DIRECTION.

THE ARROW PIERCED THROUGH THE SOLE OF KRISHNA'S FOOT.

"WHEN JARA THE HUNTER CAME NEAR, HE REALISED HIS MISTAKE AND BEGGED FOR FORGIVENESS. AFTER CONSOLING THE HUNTER, KRISHNA'S SOUL DEPARTED FROM HIS BODY. THUS, LORD KRISHNA TOO MET HIS END IN THE MANNER PREDICTED BY GANDHARI.

"MEANWHILE DARUKA, WHO HAD REACHED HASTINAPURA, REPORTED TO THE PANDAVAS THE TERRIBLE EVENTS THAT HAD TAKEN PLACE.

"SHOCKED TO HEAR THIS TERRIBLE NEWS, ARJUNA ACCOMPANIED DARUKA BACK TO DWARAKA.

"IN DWARAKA THOUSANDS OF WOMEN, FORLORN AND DESERTED, LAMENTED ALOUD ON SEEING ARJUNA.

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"EVEN THE STOUT-HEARTED ARJUNA COULD NOT BEAR TO SEE THEIR GRIEF. OVERCOME WITH SORROW AND SYMPATHY, HE FELL DOWN IN A SWOON.

"RUKMINI AND THE OTHER QUEENS RAN TO HELP HIM UP. THEY SEATED HIM ON A GOLDEN ASANA AND SAT BESIDE HIM IN SILENT SYMPATHY.

"ON RECOVERING, ARJUNA WENT TO MEET HIS UNCLE VASUDEVA. WHEN ARJUNA GREETED HIM, THE GRIEF-STRICKEN VASUDEVA CLASPED HIM TO HIS BOSOM.

OH ARJUNA! YOUR FAVOURITE PUPILS SATYAKI AND PRADYUMNA ARE NO MORE. IN FACT, THEY HAVE CAUSED THE DESTRUCTION OF THE ENTIRE VRISHNI CLAN.

BUT THEN WE CANNOT BLAME THEM. WHATEVER HAPPENED WAS AN OUTCOME OF THE CURSE OF THE RISHIS.

EVEN KRISHNA, WITH ALL HIS MIGHT AND POWER, WAS A SILENT WITNESS TO THIS MASS DESTRUCTION. PERHAPS HE DID NOT WANT TO OPPOSE THE CURSE OF GANDHARI AND THE RISHIS.

YOU, ARJUNA KNOW WELL THE GREAT PROWESS OF MY SON. YOUR GRANDSON PAREEKSHIT WAS REVIVED AFTER BEING KILLED BY ASHWATTHAMA. YET AFTER WATCHING ALL HIS KITH AND KIN BEING KILLED, HE DID NOTHING.

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KRISHNA HAS GONE AWAY SOMEWHERE AFTER TELLING ME TO DO AS YOU BID. NOW TAKE CHARGE OF THIS PLACE AND PEOPLE. I HAVE NO WISH TO LIVE ANY LONGER.

"WITH A HEAVY HEART, ARJUNA SAID—

NOR CAN I BEAR TO SEE THIS WORLD BEREFT OF MY DEAR KRISHNA. AND I KNOW THAT MY BROTHERS AND DRAUPADI WILL FEEL LIKEWISE. AH! PERHAPS THE TIME HAS COME FOR YUDHISHTHIRA TO DEPART.

I WILL TAKE THE WOMEN AND CHILDREN AND THE AGED WITH ME TO INDRAPRASTHA. DARUKA, NOW I WANT TO MEET THE MINISTERS OF THE VRISHNIS.

"THE MINISTERS ARRIVED POST-HASTE. ADDRESSING THEM, ARJUNA SAID—

PREPARE YOUR CHARIOTS AND COLLECT ALL YOUR WEALTH TO COME WITH ME TO INDRAPRASTHA. ONCE THERE, KRISHNA'S GRANDSON, VAJRA WILL BE MADE YOUR KING.

SEVEN DAYS FROM NOW, WE WILL LEAVE AT DAWN. SO HURRY UP AND PREPARE TO LEAVE WITH ME.

"ARJUNA SPENT A SAD NIGHT IN KRISHNA'S PALACE.

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"EARLY NEXT MORNING, VASUDEVA BREATHED HIS LAST.

"AFTER PERFORMING THE OBSEQUIES FOR VASUDEVA, ARJUNA WENT TO THE SPOT WHERE THE VRISHNIS HAD MET WITH THEIR DESTRUCTION.

"THERE TOO HE PERFORMED THE FINAL RITES FOR ALL THE DEAD. AFTER SEARCHING FOR KRISHNA AND BALARAMA, ARJUNA PRESUMED THEM TO BE DEAD, AND PERFORMED THE LAST RITES FOR THEM TOO.

"SEVEN DAYS LATER, ARJUNA LEFT DWARAKA. FOLLOWING HIM WERE NUMEROUS CHARIOTS OF THE CITIZENS OF DWARAKA.

"NO SOONER HAD THE SEA OF HUMANITY CROSSED THE LIMITS OF DWARAKA THAN THE CITY BEGAN TO SUBMERGE IN THE OCEAN.

HURRY! HURRY! THE SEA IS COMING CLOSER!

STRANGE ARE THE WAYS OF GOD!

"TRAVERSING THE VARIOUS MOUNTAINS AND RIVERSIDES, ARJUNA LED HIS RETINUE TO THE LAND OF FIVE RIVERS. WHEN THEY ESTABLISHED CAMP THERE, THEY WERE SET UPON BY A GROUP OF ROBBERS. WHEN ARJUNA TRIED TO USE HIS CELESTIAL WEAPONS TO COUNTER THEIR ATTACK, HE STOOD TRANSFIXED.

WHY, I CAN'T REMEMBER A THING. HOW CAN MY MEMORY FAIL ME AT THIS CRUCIAL MOMENT?

Sri Vidyabharathi Book Centre, Sirsi

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"WHILE THE DACOITS CONTINUED THE ATTACK...

...ARJUNA STOOD BY, HELPLESS. THEN HE TRIED TO ATTACK THE LOOTERS WITH ORDINARY WEAPONS. BUT SOON HIS QUIVERS, WHICH EARLIER HAD BEEN INEXHAUSTIBLE BECAME EMPTY.

"GRADUALLY, REALISATION DAWNED ON ARJUNA.

ALL THIS IS SURELY DIVINELY ORDAINED. I CANNOT RECALL THE CELESTIAL WEAPONS; MY VERY LIMBS FEEL WEAK. AH! ALL THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE ARTS OF WAR I HAD ACQUIRED IS NOT TO BE RELIED UPON, AFTER ALL.

"HAPLESSLY, HE GATHERED TOGETHER THE PEOPLE WHO WERE LEFT AND TOOK THEM TO INDRAPRASTHA WHERE VAJRA, SON OF ANIRUDDHA, WAS LATER CROWNED KING.

"AFTER MAKING ALL THE REQUISITE ARRANGEMENTS, ARJUNA MADE HIS WAY TO VEDAVYASA'S ASHRAMA.

"WHILE ARJUNA GREETED HIM WITH DUE RESPECT, VYASA SHREWDLY DETECTED THE RESTLESSNESS IN HIS MIND.

IS ANYTHING THE MATTER, ARJUNA? WHY DO YOU LOOK SO CREST-FALLEN? WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO YOU?

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"ARJUNA RETURNED TO HASTINAPURA AND NARRATED ALL THE EVENTS TO YUDHISHTHIRA.

"YUDHISHTHIRA HEARD HIM AND SAID SOLEMNLY —

WE CAN ONLY SUBMIT TO FATE.

I TOO BELIEVE THAT.

"BHEEMA, NAKULA AND SAHADEVA ALSO AGREED. YUDHISHTHIRA SAID—

SINCE YOU AGREE, LET US ARRANGE THE CORONATION OF PAREEKSHIT. I WILL LEAVE YUYUTSU IN CHARGE OF MATTERS OF STATE.

"DISCARDING HIS SILKS AND JEWELS, YUDHISHTHIRA DONNED CLOTHES OF BARK. HIS BROTHERS AND DRAUPADI DID LIKEWISE. THEN ALL THE FIVE OF THEM, ALONG WITH DRAUPADI, SET OFF ON THE JOURNEY. A DOG FOLLOWED THEM.

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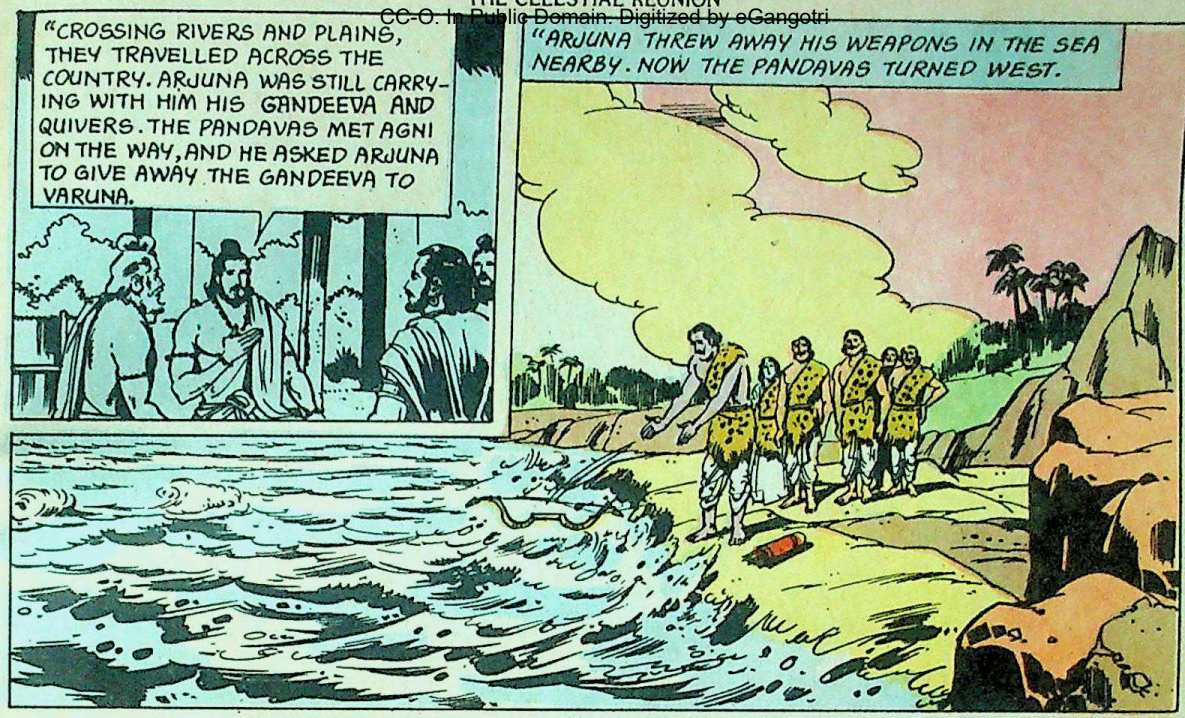

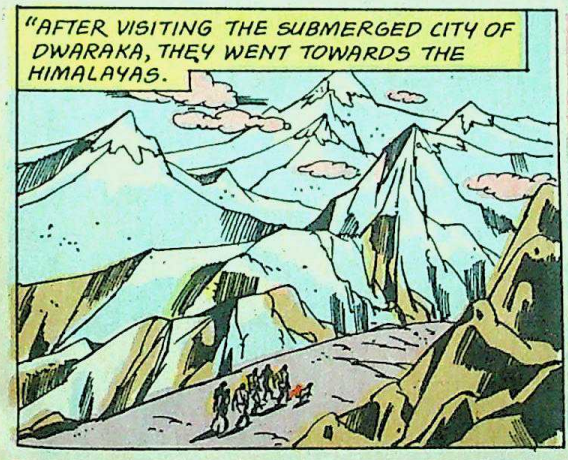

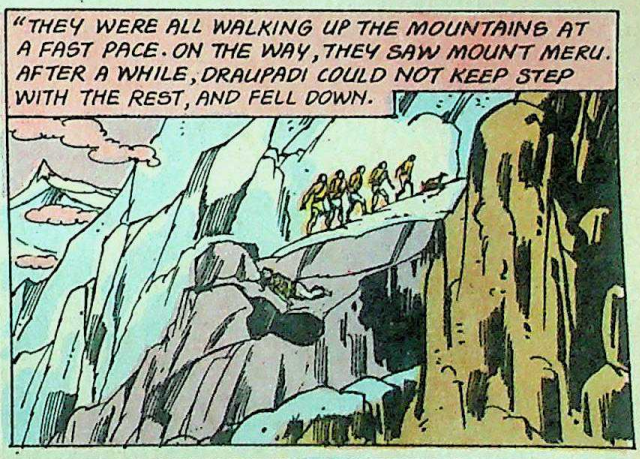

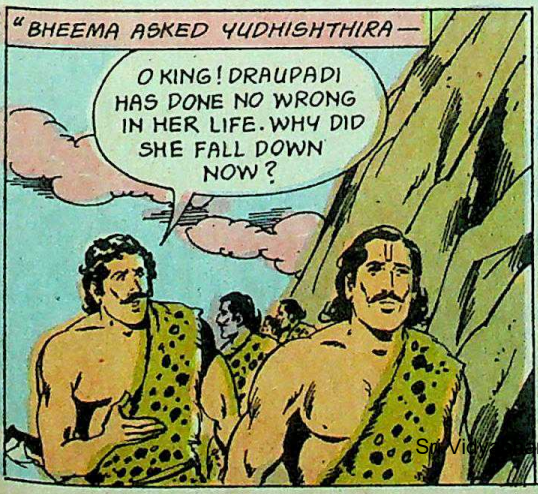

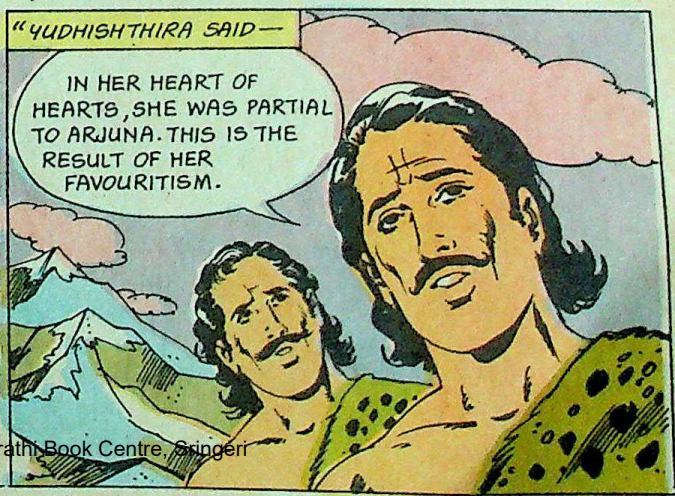

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"WITHOUT PAUSING FOR A BACKWARD GLANCE, YUDHISHTHIRA MARCHED AHEAD. A LITTLE LATER, SAHADEVA FELL.

HE WAS SO SELFLESS AND HELPFUL. WHY DID SAHADEVA HAVE TO FALL, O YUDHISHTHIRA?

SAHADEVA THOUGHT THAT NO ONE WAS AS INTELLIGENT AS HE. HIS VANITY HAS BROUGHT ABOUT HIS FALL.

"NOW THE THREE BROTHERS AND THE DOG CLIMBED UP THE MOUNTAINS. BUT NAKULA COULD NOT ENDURE THE SEPARATION FROM SAHADEVA.

LOOK! NAKULA TOO HAS FALLEN. WHY IS IT SO?

NAKULA THOUGHT HE WAS THE BEST-LOOKING PERSON IN THE WORLD. IT IS HIS VANITY THAT CAUSED HIS DOWNFALL.

"SOON, ARJUNA COLLAPSED WITH APPARENT GRIEF. BHEEMA SAID—

ARJUNA HAS NEVER TOLD A LIE, NOT EVEN IN JEST. THEN WHY DOES HE MEET HIS END THUS?

ARJUNA HAD CLAIMED THAT HE WOULD ANNIHILATE HIS ENEMIES IN JUST ONE DAY. HIS BOASTING ABOUT HIS PROWESS HAS FELLED HIM.

"NONCHALANTLY YUDHISHTHIRA WALKED ON. BHEEMA CALLED OUT AS HE TOO FELL.

WHY ME, O BROTHER? WHY ME?

YOU ATE TOO MUCH BHEEMA AND BOASTED OFTEN ABOUT YOUR UNMATCHED STRENGTH. HENCE YOUR FALL.

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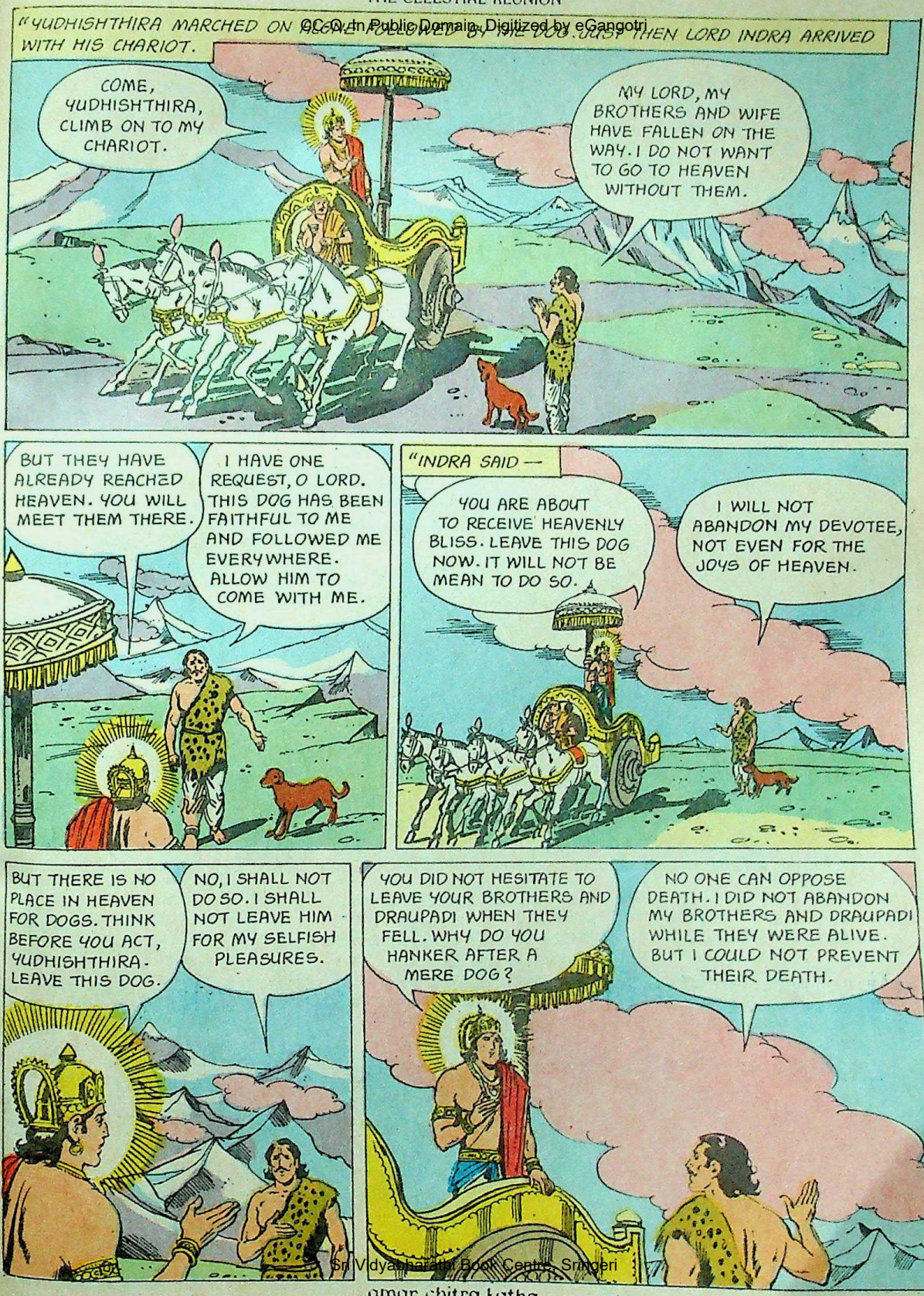

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BUT TO ABANDON A HELPLESS CREATURE WHO HAS SOUGHT REFUGE IN YOU, IS A GREAT SIN! I WILL NOT LEAVE THIS POOR DOG.

"JUST THEN LORD DHARMA, WHO HAD BEEN TESTING YUDHISHTHIRA IN THE GUISE OF A DOG, SAID —

YOUR RIGHTEOUS BEHAVIOUR AND YOUR KIND AND GENEROUS NATURE TOWARDS ALL LIVING CREATURES, MAKE YOU THE GREATEST OF ALL KINGS.

ONCE, EARLIER TOO, I HAD TESTED YOU IN THE DVAITAVANA FOREST.* THEN TOO YOU HAD DISPLAYED YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS. YOU ALONE DESERVE TO ENTER HEAVEN IN YOUR EARTHLY FORM.

"ON INDRA'S CHARIOT, YUDHISHTHIRA ROSE UP TO THE HEAVENS.

BEHOLD THESE NUMEROUS WORLDS OF THE DEVAS. FROM THE EARTH, THEY APPEAR TO BE TWINKLING STARS.

I WANT TO BE WITH MY BROTHERS, WHEREVER THEY MAY BE.

WHY DO YOU PERSIST IN RETAINING YOUR EARTHLY TIES NOW? YOUR BROTHERS CANNOT ACHIEVE YOUR STATUS.

"BUT THE TEMPTATIONS OF HEAVEN DID NOT LURE YUDHISHTHIRA.

NO, NO! I WANT TO BE WITH MY BROTHERS AND DRAUPADI.

* NO. 375 – MAHABHARATA – 24

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"WHEN THEY REACHED SWARGALOKA*, YUDHISHTHIRA SAW DURYODHANA.

LOOK AT THIS! THE WICKED DURYODHANA IS SEATED ON A RESPLENDENT THRONE, ENJOYING ALL HEAVENLY DELIGHTS! I CANNOT BEAR TO SEE THIS.

"FILLED WITH RAGE ON THUS SEEING DURYODHANA, YUDHISHTHIRA TURNED BACK AND SAID—

THE ONE WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DEATH OF OUR DEAR ONES, THE ONE WHO CAUSED THE DESTRUCTION OF THE EARTH, THE ONE WHO DRAGGED POOR DRAUPADI TO COURT, THAT VERY WICKED DURYODHANA IS HERE. I HAVE NO WISH TO BE WITH HIM. I DON'T EVEN WANT TO LOOK AT HIM.

"NARADA, WHO WAS AMONG THE ATTENDANT DEVAS, SAID WITH A LAUGH—

NO, DON'T SAY SO. BEFORE YOU COME TO HEAVEN, YOU MUST FORGET ALL YOUR OLD ANIMOSITIES.

"NARADA EXPLAINED—

DURYODHANA LIVED AND DIED LIKE A TRUE KSHATRIYA. THAT IS WHY HE DESERVED THIS HONOUR. FORGET ALL HIS WRONG DOINGS NOW.

YUDHISHTHIRA SAID—

IF THIS SINFUL DURYODHANA IS PLACED IN HEAVEN, WHERE ARE MY HONEST AND BRAVE BROTHERS? I WANT TO MEET THEM AS WELL AS KUNTI AND KARNA. WHERE ARE SHIKHANDI, VIRATA, DRUPADA, SATYAKI AND ABHIMANYU?

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* HEAVEN, ACCORDING TO HINDU CONCEPT.

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IF ONLY ALL THESE WARRIORS ARE HERE IN HEAVEN WILL I CONSENT TO STAY HERE. ELSE I WILL GO WHEREVER THEY ARE AND LIVE WITH THEM.

THE DEVAS ORDERED THEIR MESSENGER TO GO WITH YUDHISHTHIRA.

TAKE YUDHISHTHIRA TO MEET HIS DEAR ONES.

THE DIVINE MESSENGER LED YUDHISHTHIRA ALONG A TREACHEROUS PATH — DARK, DISMAL AND GLOOMY.

"AN AWFUL STENCH FILLED THE AIR, AND THERE WERE THOUSANDS OF TERRIFYING CREATURES AROUND. YUDHISHTHIRA WAS PERPLEXED.

WHAT A TERRIBLE PLACE! I CAN HARDLY BEAR TO WALK THROUGH.

WHERE ARE WE NOW? WHERE ARE MY BROTHERS? HOW FAR DO WE HAVE TO GO?

JUST HERE. NOW WE MUST RETURN. I WAS TOLD TO TAKE YOU AHEAD TILL YOU GOT TIRED.

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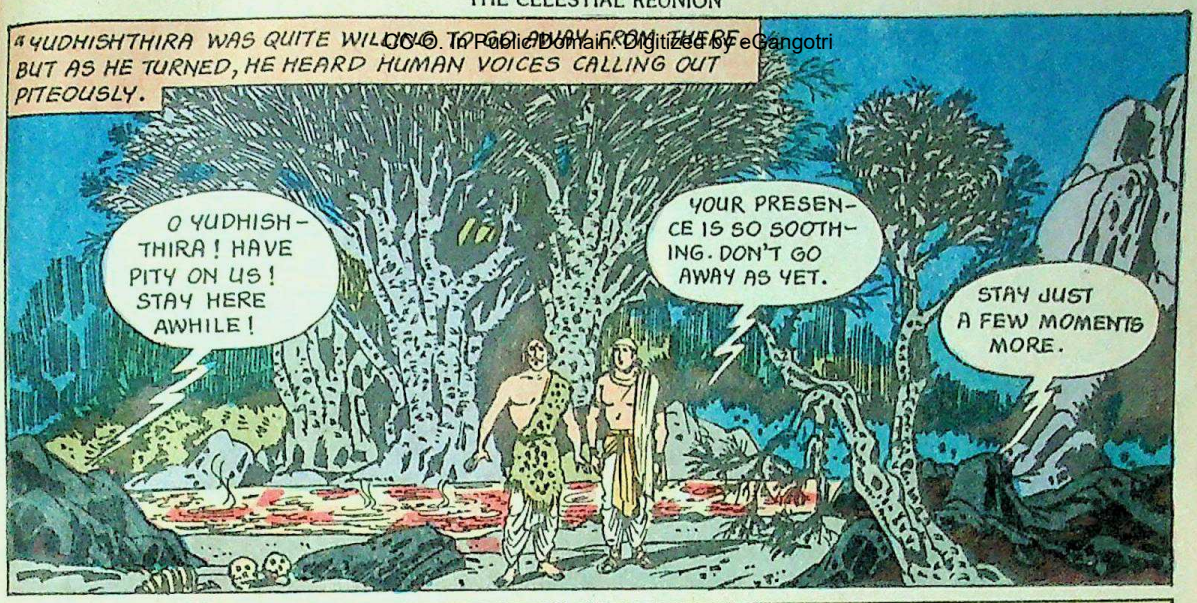

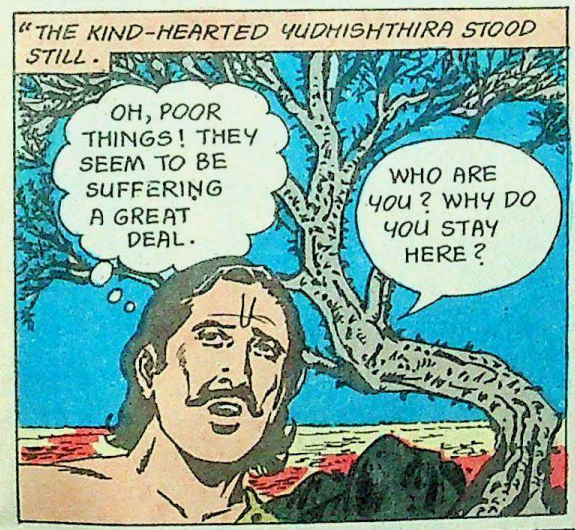

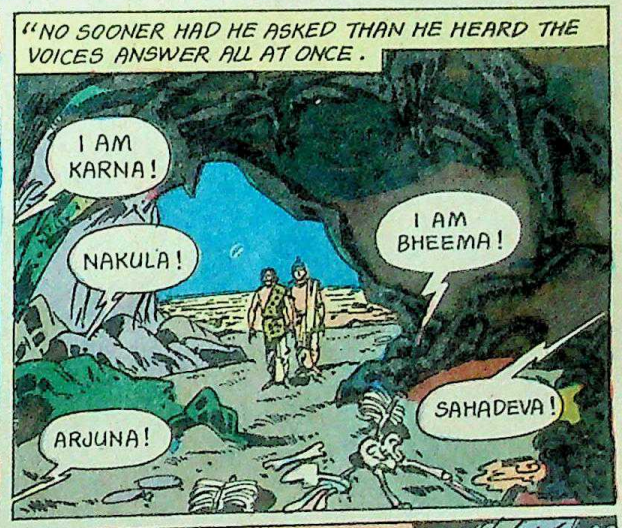

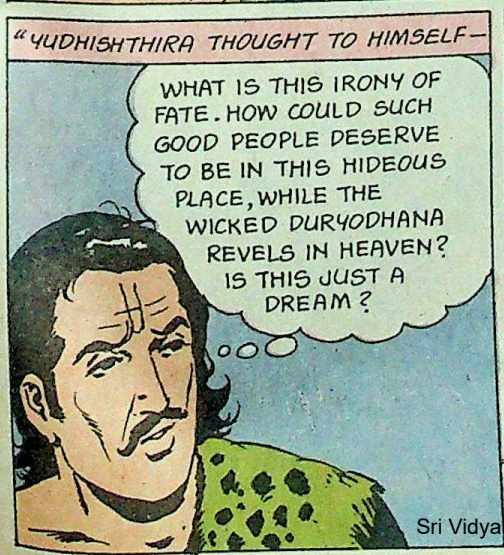

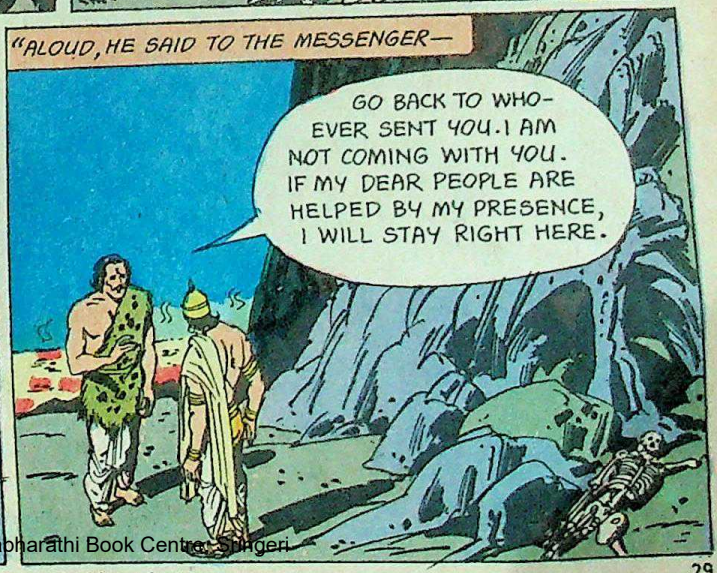

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"YUDHISHTHIRA HAD BEEN ALONE FOR JUST A COUPLE OF MINUTES WHEN THE MESSENGER RETURNED WITH INDRA AND THE OTHER DEVAS.

"THE DARKNESS DISPELLED WITH THEIR ARRIVAL. ALL THE TERRIFYING SCENES MAGICALLY DISAPPEARED. A COOL FRAGRANT BREEZE SOOTHED YUDHISHTHIRA'S TORMENTED SENSES. INDRA SAID—

YUDHISHTHIRA, YOU HAVE IN TRUTH ATTAINED HEAVEN. FORGET WHATEVER HAPPENED SO FAR. COME WITH US.

DON'T BE ANGRY BECAUSE YOU HAD A GLIMPSE OF HELL. IT ALL DEPENDS ON YOUR ACTIONS ON EARTH. DIDN'T YOU TRICK DRONACHARYA BY YOUR ONE LIE? THAT IS WHY YOU WERE TRICKED INTO SEEING HELL.

BEFORE YOU, BHEEMA, ARJUNA, NAKULA, SAHADEVA AND DRAUPADI WERE ALL GIVEN A GLIMPSE OF HELL. NOW THEY ARE ALL IN HEAVEN AS ARE THE OTHER KINGS WHO FOUGHT FOR YOU.

YOU WILL NOW DWELL AMONG THE BEST OF MEN AS A RESULT OF ALL THE MERIT YOU GAINED ON EARTH.

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"DHARMA, THE LORD OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, APPEARED AGAIN.

THIS IS THE THIRD TIME I TESTED YOU, SON. BUT NOTHING COULD SWAY YOU FROM THE PATH OF GOOD CONDUCT.

"YUDHISHTHIRA THEN BATHED IN THE CELESTIAL GANGA AND, ABANDONING HIS MORTAL BODY AT LAST, WENT TO MEET HIS KINSMEN. HE BEHELD THE RESPLENDENT KRISHNA WHOM ARJUNA WAS WORSHIPPING. BEDECKED WITH A GARLAND OF LOTUSES, DRAUPADI WAS RADIATING HER EXQUISITE BEAUTY. INDRA INTRODUCED YUDHISHTHIRA TO THE DEVAS ASSEMBLED THERE.

NOW I HAVE DESCRIBED IN DETAIL ALL THE EVENTS OF THE GREAT WAR BETWEEN THE KAURAVAS AND THE PANDAVAS. WHOEVER LISTENS TO THIS STORY OF THE MAHABHARATA WILL HAVE ALL HIS SINS WASHED AWAY, AND WILL SURELY GO TO THE ABODE OF VISHNU.

"THUS ENDS OUR RENDERING OF VAISHAMPAYANA'S RECITAL OF VYASA'S IMMORTAL ITIHASA, THE MAHABHARATA.

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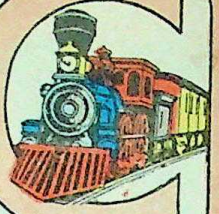

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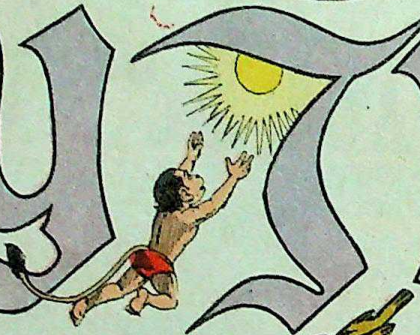

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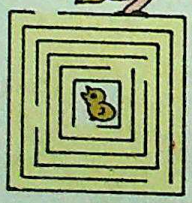
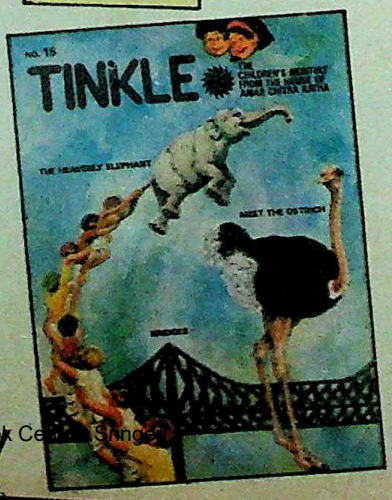


KALIA THE CROW



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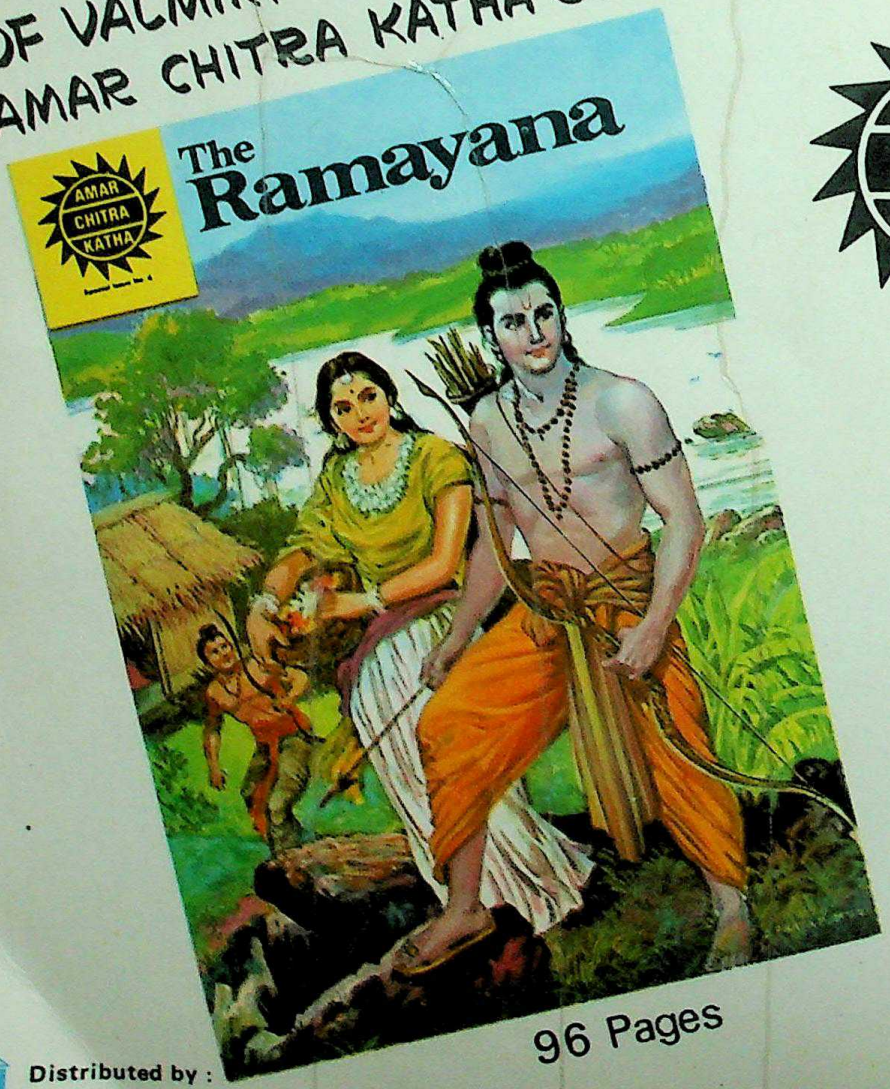

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